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**ARCHAEOLOGICAL DISCOVERIES FROM  
MURŚIDĀBĀD DISTRICT  
(WEST BENGAL)**

PART ONE





THE ASIATIC SOCIETY  
MONOGRAPH SERIES  
VOLUME XIX

ARCHAEOLOGICAL DISCOVERIES FROM  
MURŚIDĀBĀD DISTRICT  
(WEST BENGAL)

PART ONE

52378

SUDHIR RANJAN DAS  
UNIVERSITY OF CALCUTTA



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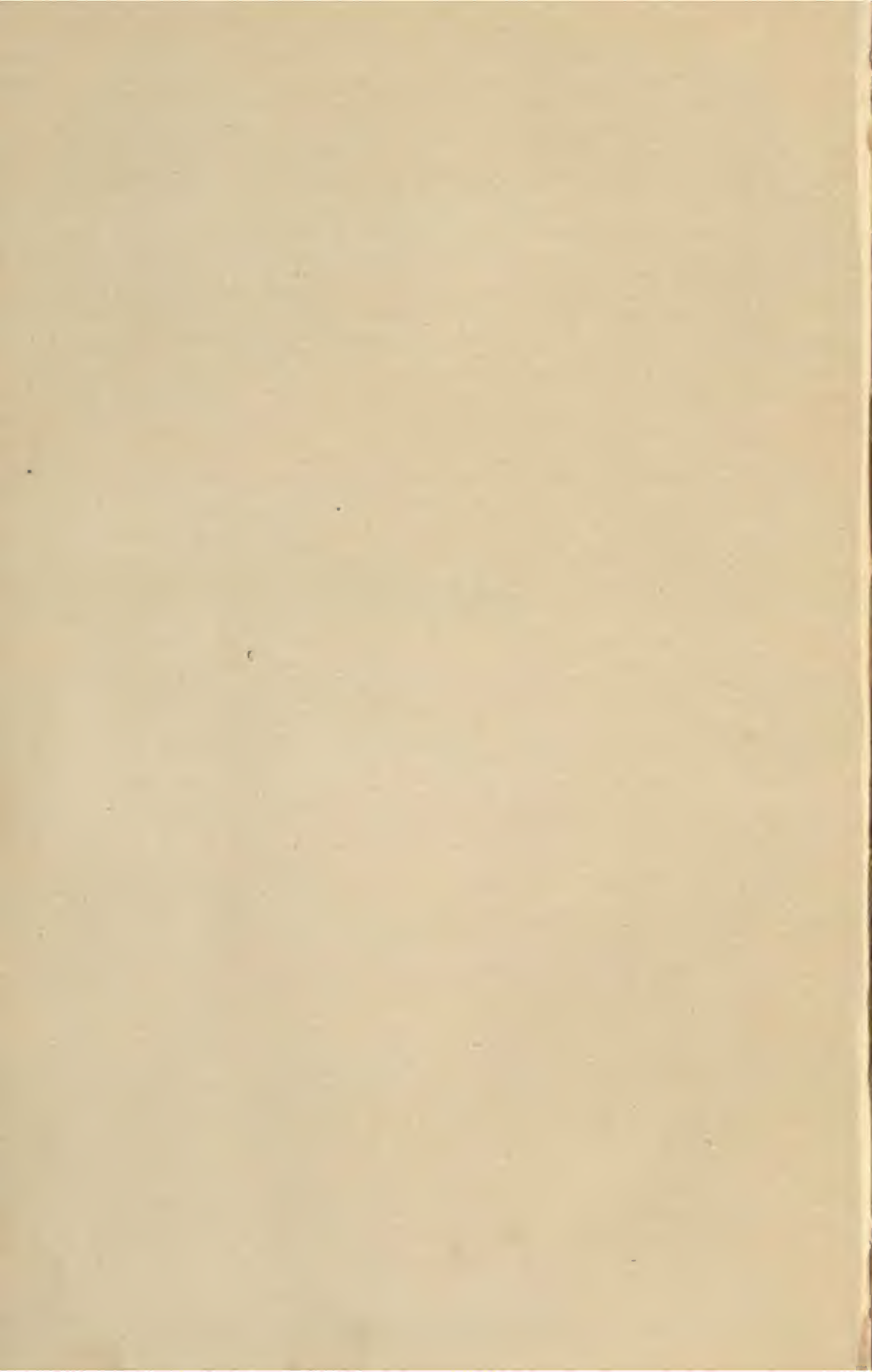
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## PREFACE





## P R E F A C E

The present monograph is a *compte rendu* on some momentous archaeological discoveries made in recent years from certain parts of the district of Murśidābād, West Bengal.

During archaeological reconnaissance in the Rāḍha tract (western side of the Bhāgirathī) of the district of Murśidābād and excavations at Rāj-bāḍidāṅgā conducted by the Department of Archaeology of the University of Calcutta many hitherto unknown conspicuous finds were recovered. All these finds are now preserved in the Museum of the University's Department of Archaeology. Reports on the discovery of these finds were communicated at the monthly general meetings of the Asiatic Society during 1968-69 and published in the Society's Bulletins and Journals. Of these communications, discourses on eleven selected finds have been incorporated in the present treatise. Reports on other finds communicated to the Society's monthly meetings will be published in the next volume.

During 1961-65 an extensive archaeological exploration was conducted in various parts of the district of Murśidābād, and a large number of remarkable finds were discovered. Of these finds, discourses on four have been included in the present monograph. Further significant discoveries were made during excavations at Rāj-bāḍidāṅgā. Of these momentous discoveries, discussions on seven finds only have been incorporated in the present treatise.

Of the four finds discovered during explorations, three were acquired from private custody and one was recovered from an accumulation of fragmentary stone sculptures lying partly embedded under a huge banyan tree in the open field. The mutilated black stone image (I) of *Mahishamardini* was an accidental discovery. Layard noticed one mutilated stone image lying under a banyan tree by the side of a mound in the village of Rāṅgāmāṭi (near Chiruṭi Railway Station), and he published an account of the image along with its sketch in the *Journal of the Asiatic Society* in 1853. Since that year, no trace of the image has been known. While engaged in excavation work at Rāj-bāḍidāṅgā in 1964-65, I came to know of one mutilated stone image lying in the courtyard of a resident of a neighbouring village. On my first visit, I could instantly correlate the image with the one described by Layard in the Society's Journal. The image has been subsequently acquired for the Museum of the Department of Archaeology. Here, the image has been faithfully produced and described along with the distorted account given by Layard.

The inscribed fragmentary stone image pedestal (VI) recovered during explorations is also an extremely important discovery. This is undoubtedly a significant addition to the number of inscribed stone images from Bengal. The extant traces of sculptured figures and the carving of luxuriant floral and vegetal devices remind one of the art creations of the Pāla-Sena period of the history of Bengal.

Besides, several stone images of Vishṇu were acquired during explorations at Amṛitakuṇḍa and Mādhuniā. Of these images, three examples have been discussed in the text. A study of these three images of Vishṇu (VII) reveals the evolutionary trends of the stone sculptural art productions in this region. These images may be attributed to a period ranging from c. eighth-ninth century to eleventh-twelfth century A.D.

Again, a fragmentary carved stele (X) was acquired from the village Mādhuniā. This is a unique stone slab bearing carved reliefs on its four faces,



each of which contains niches or panels with figures. The carved stone slab may be attributed to c. seventh-eighth century A.D.

Seven other finds treated in the following pages were discovered during excavations at Rājibāḍidāngā. A fragmentary human skull (II) was unearthed in the foundation trench of a massive wall, partly exposed at the site. Archaeological details of the discovery of the human skull and the results of its scientific examination have been incorporated, and it has been contended that this important finding pertains to the age-old practice of the foundation human sacrifice. This authentic archaeological record of the foundation human sacrifice was perhaps for the first time discovered. The practice of laying down a human skull in the foundation trench of a building is full of magical import, possibly for affording protection and durability to the structure against any natural catastrophe.

The second category of finds under discussion consists of two stucco heads (III). These two stucco heads demonstrate certain characteristic features which differentiate them from those discovered at Nālandā, Pāḥāḍpur and other places. During subsequent excavations at Rājibāḍidāngā more stucco heads were also retrieved. All these stucco heads were perhaps fixed inside the niches of the monastery walls exposed at the site. With the spread of the influence of the *Mahāyāna* Buddhism there arose a wide practice of constructing monasteries and *stūpas* adorned with innumerable images of the Buddha for earning religious merit. This is what happened in Bengal as well in the period ranging from c. fifth-sixth century to eighth-ninth century A.D.

The third discourse (IV) relates to the discovery of a wonderful metal *Dharmachakra* in a perfect condition. Details of the *Chakra* and its implications have been discussed. It is perhaps for the first time that a concrete evidence regarding the independent worship of the *Dharmachakra* made of metal has been brought to light. It is also not unlikely that this practice of the independent worship of the *Dharmachakra* might have travelled to south-east Asia from this region.

The fourth find discussed in the text consists of an exquisite bronze head (V) which has been identified with the Buddhist deity Tārā. This head may be well compared with similar examples from Nālandā and other places. The discovery of the metal images of the Buddha, Gaṇeśa, etc., attests the contention that Rājibāḍidāngā was one of the metal image manufacturing centres of eastern India.

The fifth discourse pertains to the discovery of a unique terracotta frieze of birds (VIII). The bird represented on the frieze has been identified with *hanṣa* which is closely associated with the Buddha and Buddhism. The frieze was luted to a pot, perhaps containing relics. This terracotta frieze was recovered from a stratified level and may be attributed to c. sixth-eighth century A.D.

The sixth discussion centres round the discovery of a beautiful miniature metal image of Gaṇeśa (IX) in association with two metal images of the Buddha. This image differs in certain respects from a few known examples recovered from other places of Bengal. This is again for the first time that a stratified Gaṇeśa image has been brought to light. The miniature image is to be attributed to c. seventh-eighth century A.D.

The last subject of discussion (XI) is the unearthing of two plant fossil fragments. It is indeed surprising that plant fossils of more than one million years old were found imbedded in the natural soil in one of the excavated trenches at the site. The plant fossils have been identified and their significance discussed.

Archaeological finds discussed in the present monograph are full of

historical import and the publication of the reports of their discovery in a separate volume will be extremely useful for a proper understanding of the history and culture of the people of Bengal. This very consideration impelled the author to revise the reports on the discovery of these finds and publish them in a separate monograph. The author hopes that the monograph would serve the purpose for which it is meant.

During explorations in different parts of the district of Murśidābād the author received ungrudging help and cooperation from Sri Mrinal Gupta, Sri Haridas Kali (Headmaster, Śasāṅka Vidyāpiṭh, Chirutī), Sri A. Mukherji (Headmaster, Sāgardighī H.E. School), Sri Dhiren Bag and members of the staff of the University's Department of Archaeology. The author expresses his grateful thanks to all of them. Acknowledgement is also due to the teachers and members of the staff of the Archaeology Department for the meticulous help rendered by them during the excavation work at Rājbaḍidāṅgā.

The author is beholden to the Secretary and members of the Council of the Asiatic Society for bringing out these Reports on the discovery of some archaeological finds from the district of Murśidābād in a separate monograph of the Society. Grateful thanks are also due to Dr. S. K. Mitra, Dr. B. N. Mukherjee, Dr. K. K. Dasgupta, Sri Samar Banerjee, Sri Dipak Sen and Sri S. Chaudhuri for kindly helping the author in various ways for the publication of this monograph. Acknowledgements are also due to Sri B. Chatterji, Sri N. Das, Sri P. Ghosh and Sri R. Mukherji of the Department of Archaeology for section drawings and photographs incorporated in the volume and also for general help. The jacket design has been drawn by Sri P. Ghosh.

The author is extremely grateful to his *alma mater* for kindly granting necessary permission for the publication of this monograph by the Asiatic Society.

All the subjects discussed in the monograph have been suitably illustrated. The introduction presenting a general survey of the archaeological sites includes only photographs of the generally unknown sites and objects. The author craves the indulgence of the readers for certain omissions and misprints that crept into the body of the text. The index of this volume has been prepared by my sons Sri Suranjan Das and Sri Sumit Ranjan Das.

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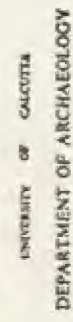
## INTRODUCTION

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## INTRODUCTION

As a background to the study of the archaeological discoveries treated in the present monograph it is necessary to introduce the regions, from where these finds were either acquired in course of explorations or recovered during excavations.

The district of Mursidābād ( $23^{\circ} 43'$  and  $24^{\circ} 52'$  north latitude and  $87^{\circ} 49'$  and  $88^{\circ} 44'$  east longitude), the north-westernmost district in the Presidency Division of West Bengal, has an area of 2095 square miles. The district is named after the city on the eastern side of the Bhāgirathī, which was the most flourishing metropolis during the last days of the Muslim rule in Bengal. The present headquarters of the district are at Berhampur, six miles south of the Mursidābād city. Since 1787, the boundary of the district has passed through several alterations. After the partition of the country in 1947 the district became bounded by the river Padmā as its north-western and eastern extremity; on the south, by the districts of Burdwan and Nadiā and on the west, by the district of Bīrbhūm and the Santhal Parganās (Fig. 1)

The city of Mursidābād and different parts of the district are quite well-known for the last vestiges of the Muslim rule in Bengal. Indubitably, the Muslim monuments and other ruins lie scattered over all parts of the district of Mursidābād. But the vast tract lying on the western side of the Bhāgirathī embodying remains of many old settlements and relics is little known. Recent archaeological explorations conducted over various parts of the district and excavations carried out at a site locally called Rājbaḍidāngā have brought to light many remarkable relics of times long past.

In respect of known monuments and other relics dating from ancient to late medieval times the district can be roughly divided into three distinct regions<sup>1</sup>: (i) The tract on the western side of the Bhāgirathī extending from Raghunāthganj to Sālār Railway Station or up to the borders of Burdwan and Nadiā districts contains ruins strewn all over. Ancient relics of this tract can be traced as far west as Bīrbhūm. (ii) The second tract extends from Rājmaḥal to Jaṅgīpur and thence on to Gauḍ and Pānduā in Māldah district. This long strip of land preserves relics of the Muslim occupation dating up to the seventeenth century. (iii) The third tract extending from Lālgolā to Mursidābād and Berhampur embodies monuments and other remains of the Nawabs of Mursidābād.

The wide belt of territory on the western side of the Bhāgirathī is geologically and historically the oldest part of the district. Archaeological relics are mostly to be found strewn over the whole area lying on this side of the Bhāgirathī. Excellent examples of stone sculptures recovered from this region are to be generally attributed to the Pāla-Sena period of Bengal. A few specimens of stone sculptures may be, however, assigned to a still earlier period. Some other finds including coins mostly belong to the Gupta and post-Gupta period.

It is, however, to be noted in this connection that ancient monuments on this wide belt of territory covering the western side of the Bhāgirathī have suffered considerably from devastations caused by the operations of both human and natural agencies. Many monuments were demolished or devastated by human operations, and others were either washed away or

<sup>1</sup> Mitra, A., *Census*, 1951, West Bengal, District Handbooks, Mursidābād, p. 181; B. Ray, *Census*, 1961, District Handbooks, Mursidābād, p. 121.



completely engulfed by the river Bhāgīrathī which changed its course very often. Besides, some monuments were also rebuilt after their demolition. In fact, many monuments passed through different stages of construction and reconstruction. In most cases, ancient relics can be traced on the surface of the mounds which are found scattered over the length and breadth of this wide tract and also along the old bed of the river Bhāgīrathī. In certain parts, mounds are often found clustering round a particular area. A continuous chain of ancient sites represented by mounds and other ruins can be detected from Bānwāribād through Sālār, Bāzārsāhu, Chiruṭi and Pañchthūpi up to Ghīāsābād and Mahipāl in the north (Fig. 1). At present, this wide area is inhabited by the Muslims, but in ancient times this was the land *par excellence* of the Hindu and Buddhist settlements. Again, upon the Hindu and Buddhist edifices or temples demolished by the potent forces of Islam were also built Muslim monuments and mosques.

Here, a summary account of some ancient sites, monuments and finds brought to light by the field investigators is presented for a correct appraisal of the archaeological and historical importance of the district of Murshidābād. Of the places yielding early historical relics, Chiruṭi and its neighbourhood figure conspicuously. All mounds, monuments and other relics have been traced out and discussed in *Rājbadīdāngā: An Interim Report on Excavations at Rājbadīdāngā*.<sup>1</sup>

(i) **Pañchthūpi:** Excepting Chiruṭi, Pañchthūpi(bi) (8 miles south of Kāndi; Burwān Police Station) is the most important place of all early settlement sites on the western side of the Bhāgīrathī (Fig. 1). *Thūpi* is a local variant form of *stūpa*, and *Pañch* denotes five in Bengali. The village was thus named, after the five *stūpas* at the place. At the south-eastern corner of the village there are ruins of four small shrines at four corners and the main temple in the centre bears beautiful examples of terracotta art creations. Here are found ruins of a *Pañchāyatana* temple complex. It is extremely interesting to note in this connection that during excavations at Rājbadīdāngā (1962, 1964-1965) which is not far-off from Pañchthūpi, ruins of more than one *Pañchāyatana* temple complex were uncarthed.<sup>2</sup>

At the north-eastern corner of the Pañchthūpi village, remains of another ancient structure locally called *Borkonār-Dōl* (*Dōl*=*Deul*, i.e., temple) are extant. In the village Kālī temple (*Kālībādī*) a black basalt stone image of Durgā (2'6" in height) showing the deity seated in *lalitāsana* with rosary, vase and trident in hands is worshipped. Besides, at the same corner of the village, there is also an extensive mound of 170' in length and about half the distance in breadth rising at a height of 15' above the ground level. Structural remains and other ruins are visible on its surface, and it has been contended that 'there is no doubt that they belong to the Pāla period'.<sup>3</sup> It can be, however, easily assumed that the mound preserves an early settlement underneath. All these ruins demonstrate the antiquity of the place. Like Rājbadīdāngā, Pañchthūpi is also perhaps an ancient Buddhist monastery site.<sup>4</sup>

(ii) **Gitagrām :** During 1928-29 an ancient settlement site was discovered at Gitagrām in Kāndi Subdivision and under Bharatpur Police Station (Fig. 1). The site yielded antiquities belonging to the 'pre-Gupta and Gupta period'. The finds from the place included clay seals, stone beads, terracotta figures and rectangular cast coins.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> S. R. Das, *Rājbadīdāngā*, pp. 8-17.

<sup>2</sup> S. R. Das, *Rājbadīdāngā*, pp. 40-41.

<sup>3</sup> *Annual Report of the Archaeological Survey of India*, 1929-30, p. 143.

<sup>4</sup> S. R. Das, *Rājbadīdāngā*, pp. 40-41.

<sup>5</sup> *Annual Report of the Archaeological Survey of India*, 1928-29, pp. 98-99.



(iii) **Chunsār** : An extensive mound was detected at Chunsār (two miles from Sālār), not far-off from Chiruṭi (Fig. 1). This extensive mound has been largely converted into agricultural fields. The mound yielded many stone beads of various shapes and designs which speak of its great antiquity<sup>1</sup>. Even at Sālār during digging a tank called *Dah-pushkariṇi* stone pillars and images were recovered.

(iv) **Ghiāsābād** : Ghiāsābād (Lālbāg Subdivision, 7 miles north of Āzimgañj) is another old place (Fig. 1). Its ancient Hindu name was Badrihāt (Budrehāt). But the Muslim changed it to 'Gyāsābād' named after Ghiāsuddin Bāhādur. In 1853 Layard recorded his visit to an old Muslim tomb at this place,<sup>2</sup> and he came to learn that it belonged to a king of Gauḍ, who has been supposed to be Ghiāsuddin Bāhādur (1319-1323). But Beveridge (1892) contended on the basis of the information supplied to him that the tomb was actually built on the remains of a saint.<sup>3</sup> It is extremely interesting to note that the structure of the tomb contains stones, bricks, etc., which remind one of the use of materials taken out from certain devastated Buddhist or Hindu monuments.

The village contains also scattered ruins of old settlements. Gastrel (1857) has given a beautiful account of the place : 'Gyasabad or Budrehat on the bank of the Bhagiruttee stands on hard bank of clay and *kañkar* (grit). In its vicinity are found remains of old pottery, old wells, the remains of a fort or palace and ancient stone slabs engraved in *Pāli* characters, all demonstrating this to have been the site of an ancient city'<sup>4</sup>. In 1853 Layard recorded the finding of two small coins discovered during 1852. These two coins along with a stone slab bearing '*Pāli* inscription' were sent to the *Asiatic Society*. Layard identified the place with a Buddhist settlement. In 1857 Sherwill reported : 'It contains ruins of an ancient city extending for some miles inland where we have found carved stone pillars and slabs with *Pāli* inscriptions, gold coins and much broken pottery'<sup>5</sup>.

Thus it appears that according to the reports of the earlier writers who visited the place the antiquity of Ghiāsābād can hardly be doubted. But nothing very conspicuous has yet been discovered, which can throw light on the early history of the village. It is, however, to be admitted that the place was an ancient habitation site. It seems likely that Ghiāsābād was perhaps an extension of Mahipāl, the supposed site of the capital city of the Pāla king Mahipāla. During the early period of the Muslim rule Ghiāsābād became a prosperous city which was perhaps built with bricks and stones obtained from the demolished buildings at Mahipāl. In 1908-09 Chakravarti presumed the identification of the place with the site of Lakhmanti<sup>6</sup> (or Lakhan).

(v) **Kirīṭeśwari** : Another old place is Kirīṭeśwari in the Lālbāg Subdivision (4 miles west of Lālbāg) on the western side of the Bhāgirathī (Fig. 1). Its ancient name was Kiriṭkaṇā. Rennel in his map mentions the name of the place as 'Kiriṭkonā' or 'Tiraṭkonā' which occurs also in the *Riyāz-us-salatīn*<sup>7</sup>. This place is also mentioned in the *Bhaviṣya Purāṇa* (c. 15th-16th century). It is evident that the place was named after its deity, Kirīṭeśwari. According to the *Tantras*, the place is one of the 51 *Pīṭhasthānas*. It is further believed that the *kirīṭa* (crown) of Sati dropped at this very place. The deity

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 98-99.

<sup>2</sup> *Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 1853, p. 577.

<sup>3</sup> *Calcutta Review*, 1892, pp. 322-45.

<sup>4</sup> Mitra, A., *Census*, 1951, West Bengal, District Handbooks, Mursidābād, p. 190.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. XLIX-L.

<sup>6</sup> *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 1909, p. 215.

<sup>7</sup> O'Malley, L.S.S., *Bengal District Gazetteers*, Mursidābād, p. 203.



now worshipped is a black stone engraved with floral motifs, and she is called Vimalā or Kirīṭeśwari and Bhairav-sambarta. The crown called *Guptapīṭh* is preserved in a pot covered with red silk. This pot is rarely exposed to the people. A tablet in one of the several temples here bears an inscription as : 'Śake Śatāśṭha Kāleṇdu'. Sri N. Bagchi following the dictum 'aṅkasya vāmāgati' read the inscription and explained it as : 'Indu=moon=1; kāla=trikāla=3; aṣṭa=8; śata=7'. Thus we have  $1387 + 78$  (Śaka Era beginning at 78 A.D.) = 1465.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, the date of the temple is to be fixed at 1465 A.D. In the eighteenth century, Darpanārāyaṇa Rāy restored many old temples at this place and consecrated also a number of *Līngas*, ruins of which lie scattered over a wide area. Kirīṭeśwari is even today the most sacred place of the district.

(vi) **Sāgardighi** : Next to Kirīṭeśwari Sāgardighi in Jaṅgipur Sub-division (10 miles north-east of Azimgaṅj on the Azimgaṅj-Nalhāṭi Railway line of the Eastern Railway) is most famous for its wonderful lake and other monuments and ruins (Fig. 1). Here is a large lake measuring 500 × 300 yards, and its depth is as yet untraced (Pl. 1a). The lake had ten brick built *ghāṭs* (bathing places) with three extant flights of steps on each of its northern and southern banks and two with two extant flights of steps on each of the eastern and western banks. On the north-eastern corner of the western bank of the lake, ruins of a brick built structure locally called the residence of the *Buḍā-pīr* (old Muslim saint) are extant. Just in the centre of the eastern bank there are again remains of another brick built structure, locally attributed to *Buḍā-pīr's* sister's son (nephew). According to a local legend, the two *pīrs* (uncle and nephew) participated in a boat-race in this lake before starting for Bārā, a village to the western border of the district. They were extremely pleased with their boat-race in the lake and finally decided to settle on the bank of the lake. The uncle built his house on the north-eastern corner and became known as 'Barbarī-Shāh' and the nephew, in the central position of the eastern bank and came to be called *Buḍā-pīr*.<sup>2</sup> The local people do also believe that in ancient times there was also a temple consecrated to Śiva in front of each *ghāṭ*. A little away from the southern bank of the lake there is a Muslim *Dargā* (tomb) which contains remnants of Hindu and Muslim architectural components.

Sometimes back, an inscribed stone slab was found lying on one of the steps of the lake, and about 50 years ago, a rice-merchant is said to have taken it away. The inscribed stone slab is as yet untraced. But some villagers noted down the contents of the inscription and fortunately, late N. N. Ray could collect the *Ślokas* from the records under the possession of more than one individual<sup>3</sup>. The inscription on the stone slab as recorded by Ray runs:

1. Śake saptaśatāśṭhike sthite Sāgardīghikā |
2. Pālavamśakṛitam khātam Brahmahamukṛtihetunā ||
3. Barbarādaśasāhasrāṇi śaṣṭi sahasrāṇi khātakāḥ |
4. Ishṭakādaśalakṣhāṇi trīṇaṁ kāṣṭhāṇi dvayaṁ dvayaṁ ||
5. Govām śatasahasrāṇi suvarṇam śaṭpālādīkām |
6. Śītastraṇyāsankhyāṇi dhautam vastraṁ janam janam ||
7. Śaśasyabhumidānaṁcha śālagrāmasya sannidhau |
8. Viprebhyo dakṣiṇādatvā itī Sāgaradīghikā ||

During 1965 I had the opportunity of recording another version of this inscription, now in the possession of Sri A. Mukherji, Headmaster of

<sup>1</sup> Mitra, A., *Census*, 1951, West Bengal, District Handbooks, Murśidābād, pp. 188-89; O' Malley, L.S.S., *Bengal District Gazetteers*, Murśidābād, p. 203; B. Ray, *Census*, 1961, District Census Handbook, Murśidābād, p. 134.

<sup>2</sup> Ray, N. N., *Murśidābāder Itihās* (in Bengali), pp. 131, 146.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*



Sāgardighi H.E. School. It was learnt that Sri Mukherji copied the inscription from another gentleman's old records. The copy of the inscription in the possession of Sri Mukherji is not a complete one. The inscription as copied by me runs:

1. *Sake saptadaśābdike kṛita sāgardirghekai |*
2. *Pālavaiśakṛitāḥ khādaḥ Brahmahamuktihetunām ||*
3. *Barbarādaśasāhasrāṇi śatasahasrāṇi-iṣṭakāḥ |*
4. *Satalakshyāni khādakā trīṇakāṣṭha dvayaṁ dvayaṁ ||*
5. *Gābhīdhenu sahasrāṇi. . .*

It is evident from a comparative study of the two versions that the inscription passed through considerable changes, even in wordings. There were also considerable interpolations. The subject-matter and the contents of the inscription are, however, analogous. But the authenticity of this stone slab-inscription has been questioned.

It appears from the contents of the inscription that the lake was excavated by a member of the Pāla dynasty in order to escape from the sin of killing a Brāhmaṇa. At the time of digging the lake, 10,000 labourers and 6000 diggers were employed. Ten lacs of bricks and two lacs of wood pieces were required. One hundred thousand cows and more than six *palas* of gold were given to each. Besides, countless woolen and ordinary clothes and lands were also given to the Brahmins. From the contents of the first *śloka* (*Sake saptadaśābdike*) it appears that the great lake was dug by the seventh or eighth century A.D. or that the lake was extant at that time.

But the name of the member of the ruling Pāla dynasty responsible for digging the lake is not mentioned in the inscription. According to the local legend, the lake was dug by the Pāla king Mahipāla. It is said that in spite of deep digging, the sub-soil water level could not be reached. Then the king was told in a dream that if a potter, Sāgar by name, could be made to go into the centre of the excavated lake and strike below with a mattock, the sub-soil water would come out. The king at once sent for Sāgar who agreed to do so on condition that a canoe would be kept ready for his escape and that the people must assemble on the bank of the lake to witness the operation. This was agreed upon and the potter did as was desired by the king.

According to another legend collected from Sri Mukherji, the lake was dug by a king. But it had no water because of the curse of a *Fakir* (Muslim saint). As no water came out, the king built a tower-temple in the centre of the lake and performed all kinds of religious rites for the sub-soil water to come out. At last, the king was ordained in a dream to make Sāgar-kumār (potter Sāgar by name) to dig at least one spade-ful earth. Sāgar did so and there was a tremendous rush of water filling the lake. Accordingly, the lake came to be called Sāgardighi after the name of the potter Sāgar.

The story recorded from Sri Mukherji differs a little from the one collected by late N. N. Ray. It is, however, evident that the legend passed through many changes and the second story took its present form under the Muslim influence. The local people look upon the lake with great awe, wonder and veneration (Pl. Ia).

In the centre of the lake there is a tower-like monument or a tower-temple as related in the legend. It was learnt from the local sources that during dry summer (usually in the months of May and June) the summit of the monument can be seen. Sri Mukherji informed me that in 1965 its top was visible at the height of 2' above water, and it looked considerably damaged. The local people have formed an idea about the nature and character of the structure by tracing it with a bamboo pole. It was further learnt that the structure has altogether eight side-faces with a tower-like formation.



The conical end of the tower is broken, and its extant summit is about 18" in diameter.

Besides some excellent sculptures belonging to the Pāla-Sena period, Sāgardighi has not yielded any other positive finds attesting the ancientness of the place. But Muslim coins are easily available from Sāgardighi and its neighbourhood, a good collection of which is now in the possession of Sri Mukherji. One of the coins presented to the University by Sri Mukherji bears the legend : *Jlu (Julus)*, i.e., regnal year which is not very clear and *Slt (Sultan)*<sup>1</sup>, i.e., of the Turk-Afghan period. The coin may be attributed to Sher Shāh or Islam Shāh.

In the southern and eastern direction from Sāgardighi, some mounds and scattered ruins including fragmentary stone sculptures are still extant. While proceeding to Brāhmaṇīgrām from Sāgardighi we came across a huge mound with pottery sherds strewn over (Pl. 1b). It was learnt from the local sources that at Brāhmaṇīgrām a temple was built overnight. This temple is said to have contained a stone lintel and a plate bearing an inscription giving details of the digging of the great lake, and that they were fixed on the wall of a subsequently built mosque. The plate bearing the inscription is reported to have been taken away by an Englishman. At the same village, on the eastern side of the present mosque with corrugated tin roof, there are ruins of a brick built structure bearing wonderful ornamented terracotta panels (Pls. II a,b; III a, b). The ornamentation consists of floral, vegetal and geometrical patterns. The ruins are found scattered on an elevated area (Pls. II and III) and it is quite likely that the dilapidated structure, perhaps a mosque, was built on the ruins of a Hindu temple. In fact, bricks and stones were dug up and used in the construction of the mosque. Even the present mosque, built about one hundred years before, contains some terracotta panels fixed on its mud wall. The name of the village is also significant. It appears that the place was once a centre of Brahmanism. This contention is further attested by the sculptural ruins scattered in and around Sāgardighi. All these demonstrate the antiquity of Sāgardighi and its neighbourhood. A little away from Sāgardighi a place called Hukārhat is also said to have been the site of the palace of the king Mahipāla<sup>2</sup>.

(vii) **Mahipāl** : But the actual site of the metropolis of the king Mahipāla might be located at Mahipāl, north of Bārāla Station (Fig. I). It is now called Mahipāl-Halt, 140·6 miles from Howrah. Ghīāsābād may be supposed to be an extension of the city of Mahipāla. Here is a large mound extending over a wide area, a brief description of which has been given by late N. N. Ray<sup>3</sup>. Numerous antiquities were recovered from this mound, of which the most interesting one is a ten-armed male figure along with male and female attendants<sup>4</sup>. Many stone sculptures and other antiquities of the Pāla-Sena period were also collected by Sri Singhi from this area. There is another village nearby called Āmlābādī which is supposed to have been the quarters of the ministers of the king Mahipālā. The extensive mound at the place has been generally taken as the site for the capital of the Pāla king Mahipāla in the eleventh century A.D.

(viii) **Chandanvāṭī** : Another important site bearing ruins of an old settlement is Chandanvāṭī, near Sāgardighi (Pl. IV). The village of Chandanvāṭī lies at a distance of two miles to the south-east of Sāgardighi. During explorations conducted in this area in 1965 an extensive mound at a height of 10'-12' above the ordinary field level was detected. It was indeed sur-

<sup>1</sup> The legend on the coin was read by Dr. C. Dutta of the University of Calcutta.

<sup>2</sup> Mitra, A., *Census*, 1951, West Bengal, District Handbooks, Murshidābād, p. LX.

<sup>3</sup> Ray, N. N., *Murshidābāder Itihās*, pp. 139-40.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 141-42.



prising to notice exposed huge structural remains on the side of the mound (Pl. IVa). It was learnt on enquiry that the mound was previously in the possession of Surendranarayan Singhi Bahadur (Nihalia, Jiāgañj). The Muslim inhabitants of the neighbouring villages used to dig up large stone slabs and bricks from this mound. Subsequently, Sri N. K. Singha Nowlakha of Azimganj purchased the entire area and started digging in 1334 B.S. (1927). The digging is said to have been carried out for sometime up to the sub-soil water level exposing thereby huge brick structures extending towards the south (Pl. IVa). This digging was evidently done for treasure hunting, and practically nothing is known about the antiquities recovered, excepting a large Śiva-*linga* inside the *Gauripaṭṭa* which might have baffled all attempts of removal. The size of the brick and the nature of the exposed building construction demonstrate the architectural patterns of the post-Gupta period. After the completion of this digging, the area was sold to a Marwari merchant of Sāgardighi who built a new temple on the elevated portion of the mound and installed the unearthed Śiva-*linga* there in 1368 B.S. (1961). The *linga* is now daily worshipped. Just above the door-panel, it is written: '*Dātā Kalu Rāmchānd Raghunāth Sadāni Sāgardighi kāpaḍer dōkān*' (Pl. IVb).

The unearthed *linga* is the largest example so far found in this area. From the base, the height of the *linga* with *Gauripaṭṭa* is 6'9", and the *linga* itself is 1' in height from the surface of the *Gauripaṭṭa*. The circumferences of the *linga* and *Gauripaṭṭa* are 4'8" and 12'6" respectively (Pl. Va).

(ix) **Bhāṅg(ā)imilkī (Suki)**: On the way to Sāgardighi some other sites containing old stone sculptures belonging to the Pāla-Sena period were found lying in accumulation under a huge banyan tree in the open field. This is the sacred place of the neighbouring villages, where on all religious occasions the villagers meet and offer their worship. From Bhāṅgimilkī-Suki (Lālbāg Subdivision and Navagrām Police Station) many such fragmentary stone sculptures were recovered, one of which bears an inscription belonging to c. tenth-eleventh century A.D. A discussion on an inscribed fragmentary stone image pedestal recovered from the accumulated stone image fragments under the banyan tree has been included in the body of the text (see pages 25-26; Pl. I.).

(x) **Amṛitakuṇḍa (Amarkuṇḍa)**: Another old settlement site is Amṛitakuṇḍa or Amarkuṇḍa under Navagrām Police Station, three miles from Raindā (Fig. 1). There is an old temple here, which has fallen down and deserted. In 1965 the temple was found covered with shrubs and plants (Pl. Vb). The door with its stone lintel is in perfect condition. This temple is called *Gaṅgādityer-mandir*, i.e., the temple of Gaṅgā and Āditya. It was learnt that the temple was built in 1307-1308 B.S. (1900-01) on an earlier temple foundation (Pl. Vb). There was another temple by its side dedicated to Śiva. The *linga* and *yoni* are still *in situ*. All the images which were once enshrined in these two temples are now worshipped by the village priest named Sri Harakumar Misra in a portion of his house. Several images of Viṣṇu, Buddha, Sūrya, etc., including a few broken images have been all arranged in a row on a wooden platform. One of these images is a large figure of the Buddha worshipped as Raghunāth or Viṣṇu. There is another image of Sūrya with Aruṇa and seven horses carved in a series as a frieze. Another beautiful stone image of Viṣṇu was presented to the Department of Archaeology by the village priest, a discussion on which has been also included in the text. All the stone sculptures examined at this place belonged to the Pāla-Sena Period and the dilapidated temple may be attributed to a still earlier date.

Next to Amṛitakuṇḍa, the neighbouring areas of the village Mādhuniā



were explored. Through the courtesy of Sri Dhiren Bag, a large number of stone sculpture fragments was acquired from a local resident. It is highly interesting to note that a fragment of the partly damaged Vishṇu image acquired from the village Amṛitakuṇḍa was found amongst this collection of stone sculpture fragments. The fragment has been mended to the image and it is now a perfect figure of Vishṇu. Besides, while passing through a pathway trodden by bullock-cart, a large stone slab was found partly imbedded. The stone slab was unearthened and acquired. It is a large carved stone lintel with a seated figure inside a niche in the centre. There are also a few mounds on both sides of the pathway yielding pottery sherds and other objects. One human skeleton and pottery fragments recovered from one of these mounds were presented to the Archaeology Department by Sri Dhiren Bag.

Besides these old settlement sites explored by the investigators, there are many ancient temples scattered over different parts of the district. All these temples are not very old and the majority of them are to be attributed to c. seventeenth-nineteenth century A.D. A resumé of some temples is given here:

- (a) Dayāmayī temple at Saidābād Kuñjaghātā (northern part of Berhampur town) consists of a quadrangle with temples inside. The main temple is of *Jorbāṅglā* variety and there are twelve other smaller shrines. The main shrine bears an inscribed tablet which gives the date of its construction as 1166 B.S. (1759). There are several other temples in its neighbourhood belonging to the eighteenth century.
- (b) Jagatśeṭh temple at Mahimpur (Mursīdābād Police Station) is an interesting one. The old temple was engulfed by the river, and a new one was built. This temple contains wonderful mosaic of old Dutch tiles bearing scenes from the Bible, floral and vegetal designs, etc.
- (c) Bhṛīgurāmvātī (Jiāgañj Police Station) also contains relics of some Jaina temples belonging to the eighteenth-nineteenth century A.D.
- (d) Devīpur (Jiāgañj Police Station) has two monasteries called *Mastārām Āuliā* and *Choṭa Āuliā*. The former has a wonderful collection of metal images numbering no less than five hundred. The monastery was built by a deed of gift made by Rāṇī Bhavānī in 1162 B.S. (1755).
- (e) Sādekbāg contained an old monastery of Mastārām. It was indeed a large monastery comprising underground cells. The temple has been, however, engulfed by the river, but its traces are still visible.
- (f) Barānagar (two miles from Āzimgañj Station) is famous for many beautiful temples built by Rāṇī Bhavānī and her family members. Of many temples, the more important ones are the octagonal Bhavānīśwar temple, Chārbāṅglā temple, i.e., a group of four temples around a courtyard having a typical Bengali architectural pattern bearing exquisite terracottas representing Hindu mythological scenes, Aṣṭabhūja Gaṇeśa temple, Dayāmayībāḍī, Paṇchamuṇḍīpīṭh, etc. All these temples are now protected monuments.
- (g) Narasimhadeva temple at Gokarna (Kāndī Subdivision) is also a beautiful shrine dated at 1502 (*Śakābda*).
- (h) At Govarhātī there is also a beautiful temple of Brīṇḍāvanachandra, dated at 1694 (*Śakābda*).



- (i) At Kāndi (19 miles from Berhampur) and Jemo (Jāmui) there are also many temples. At Jemo a group of temples dedicated to Śiva is extant. Of all the extant temples the one of Rudradeva is extremely interesting. The temple enshrines a Buddha image which is worshipped as a Brahmanical deity. The image bears eight great scenes on the life of the Buddha. The Buddha himself is in *Bhūmisparśa-mudrā*. On his right, from top to bottom are the busts of the Buddha indicated by *Varada-mudrā*; on his left, are the scenes of the offerings of the cup by the guardians of the four patrons, the subduing of the elephant, Nalagiri and Śrāvastī miracle; and on the top occurs the scene of the Buddha's death. Stylistically, the sculpture represents the Eastern School type belonging to the ninth-tenth century A.D.<sup>1</sup>

These are some conspicuous monuments and relics brought to light by field investigations in recent years. It is thus evident that all markedly old settlement sites including monuments and other relics have been detected in the wide belt of the territory lying on the western side of the river Bhāgīrathī. An extensive and intensive archaeological explorations along the old bed of the river Bhāgīrathī would certainly yield many more ancient Hindu and Buddhist relics. But even these very few known monuments and ancient remains are sufficient enough to demonstrate the ancientness of this part of the district of Mursidābād.

Besides surface collections and acquisitions of finds from private custody, excavations were also undertaken at a few sites with the purpose of discovering relics of ancient settlements, Buddhist shrines and Hindu temples. Of the cities that thrived in the Rāḍha tract of the district, the one most well-known and distinguished in ancient times was of course Karnaśuvārṇa, the grand metropolis of the Gauḍa kingdom under Śaśāṅka, the first Sovereign of Bengal in the first half of the seventh century A.D. The famous city of Karnaśuvārṇa has been mentioned and described in both literary and inscriptional records. A detailed account of the city and the kingdom is, however, to be found in the records of the Chinese pilgrim Hiuen Tsang who visited the city during its most flourishing period of existence. The Chinese pilgrim has also presented a glowing description of the Buddhist *stūpas*, monasteries, etc., and also of many Jaina and Hindu temples on the outskirts of the capital city. Of all the Buddhist monasteries described by the Chinese pilgrim, the most illustrious one was *Raktamṛttikā-mahāvihāra*. In all records of the Chinese pilgrim it has been unambiguously stated that the *Raktamṛttikā* monastery stood in the neighbourhood of the capital city of Karnaśuvārṇa. But most unfortunately, the exact locations of both Karnaśuvārṇa and *Raktamṛttikā* have been unknown for a long time past. Since the middle of the last century, archaeologists and historians have proposed various sites for the location of Karnaśuvārṇa. But none of them could produce any unimpeachable archaeological record in support of their respective proposals. As a result, the question of the identification of Karnaśuvārṇa or *Raktamṛttikā* has been a matter of great controversy and as such, it is an intricate problem in the history of Bengal.

It was only during 1928-29 that a serious attempt was made to discover solid archaeological records for the identification of Karnaśuvārṇa and its illustrious monastery *Raktamṛttikā*. But unfortunately, the excavations carried at Rākshasidāṅgā (demon's mound; near Chiruti Railway Station) could not produce any concrete material for the identification of Karna-

<sup>1</sup> *Annual Report of the Archaeological Survey of India, 1929-30*, p. 143; Mitra, A., *Census, 1951, West Bengal, District Handbooks, Mursidābād*, p. 189; B. Ray, *Census, 1961, District Handbooks, Mursidābād*, p. 135.



suvarṇa and *Raktamṛttikā-mahāvihāra*. The excavator confessed in his Report published in 1933 that 'no definite information is available about its identity with Karpasuvarṇa-vihāra'. Since 1928-29, no other attempt was made to determine the exact location of Karpasuvarṇa, and the long outstanding problem remained unsolved. After a lapse of thirty-two years, the Department of Archaeology of the University of Calcutta contrived a comprehensive plan of archaeological explorations and excavations with the purpose of solving this problem in the history of Bengal. At the first instance, an extensive programme of exploration work was undertaken at some of the proposed sites for Karpasuvarṇa. After taking into consideration all available materials, a site locally called Rājbaḍḍidāṅgā on the western side of the river Bhāgirathī was selected for excavation with the primary object of determining the exact location of Karpasuvarṇa and its monastery *Raktamṛttikā*.

Rājbaḍḍidāṅgā (palace-mound) is an extensive mound standing massively in the north-western periphery of the village named Jadupur, near Chiruti Railway Station of the Eastern Railway, 119 miles from Howrah. The imposing mound of Rājbaḍḍidāṅgā is almost barren lying at a distance of 2195.66 yards by road in north-easterly direction from the Chiruti Station. The total area of the mound is 503500 sq. ft. and its elevation ranges from 89' to 101' above the mean sea-level and 12'-14' above the agricultural field level<sup>2</sup>. The excavation at the site was undertaken in 1962.

Excavations at Rājbaḍḍidāṅgā for the last few seasons revealed hitherto unknown magnificent building complexes<sup>3</sup>. Many rich antiquities including a large number of inscribed terracotta seals and sealings were also recovered. Some of these seals bear the *Dharmachakra*-deer motif and two lines of inscription below. The legend on these seals actually contains the name of *Raktamṛttikā-mahāvihāra*, and they were issued by the *Bhikṣuśaṅgha* of the monastery like those issued by the monasteries of Nālandā, Pāhāḍpur, Ratnagiri, etc. On the strength of the contents of the seal inscriptions and other unearthed finds the site under excavation has been firmly identified with the *Raktamṛttikā* monastery of Hiuen Tsang's accounts. Accordingly, the famous capital city of Karpasuvarṇa is also to be located in the neighbourhood of the excavated site of Rājbaḍḍidāṅgā<sup>4</sup>.

The excavation unravelled several building complexes belonging to six structural phases and three cultural periods<sup>5</sup>. The building complexes of the Phase III and cultural Period II are to be ascribed to the Buddhist monastic establishment of the seventh century A.D. The first two structural phases attributed to the cultural Period I were wholly unassociated with the inscribed seals, and accordingly, they were anterior to the seal-yielding level. On palaeographical grounds, the inscribed seals may be attributed to a period ranging from c. fifth-sixth century to eighth-ninth century A.D. Innumerable rich antiquities were also recovered, and most of them are unique. The majority of these finds were retrieved from the cultural Period II. Finds unearthed at the site bear also evidences of the prevailing influence of both Brahmanism and Buddhism. The earliest period revealed also records of the Tāntric cult practices as well.

The excavation at Rājbaḍḍidāṅgā yielded innumerable antiquities of great historical import. Of these antiquities, seven specimens only have been treated in the present monograph with particular reference to their archaeological and historical bearings. The discourses on these seven finds reveal

<sup>2</sup> *Annual Report of the Archaeological Survey of India, 1928-29*, pp. 99-100.

<sup>3</sup> S. R. Das, *Rājbaḍḍidāṅgā*, pp. 21-22.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 24-25.

<sup>5</sup> S. R. Das, *Rājbaḍḍidāṅgā*, pp. 43, 51-66.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 33-41.

not only the archaeological potentiality of the site under excavation, but also throw considerable light on the dark chapters of the early history and culture of the people of Bengal.

The above limited introductory survey of ancient settlements and finds brought to light by archaeological operations firmly attests the historicity of the Rāḍha tract of the district of Murśidābād. Further discourses on many more finds procured from this area will no doubt enhance our knowledge considerably about the bygone history and cultural patterns of the people of Bengal. This introduction promotes the prime necessity of contriving well thought-out comprehensive programme of extensive and intensive archaeological explorations and excavations in this part of the district in pursuance of solving certain intricate problems of our history. The successful operation of such a programme can alone unveil the mystery that envelops till today the early history of Bengal.







(a) Sāgarilghī : A panoramic view of the great lake.

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(b) Sāgarilghī : A general view of an extensive mound.







(a) Brāhmaṇagrām : A general view of structural ruins on the mound.



(b) Brāhmaṇagrām : Ruins of an old square structure.





(a) Brāhmaṇagrām : A long view of ruins of a building bearing ornamented terracotta works.



(b) Brāhmaṇagrām : A close view of ornamental works.







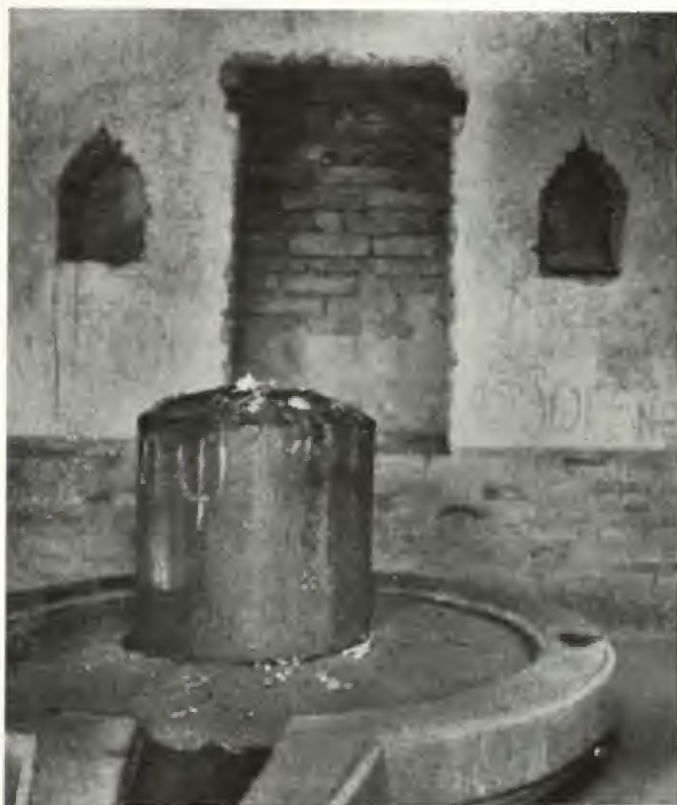
(a) Chandanvāṭī : A general view of unearthed building remains.



(b) Chandanvāṭī : A recently built temple on the mound with Śiva-*linga* enshrined.







(a) Chandanvāṭī : Large Śiva-līṅga inside the recently built temple.



(b) Amṛitakuṇḍa : A general view of the dilapidated temple.



TEXT





## A BLACK STONE IMAGE FROM CHIRUṬĪ (MURŚIDĀBĀD, WEST BENGAL)

In the middle of the 19th century Capt. Layard witnessed a mutilated black stone image under a banyan tree by the side of a mound called Rākshasīdāngā, near Chiruṭī Railway Station on the Eastern Railway, 119 miles from Howrah. A short description of the image including a free-hand sketch was presented by Layard in his article on '*The Ancient City of Kansonapuri Now Called Rungamutty*' published in the Asiatic Society's Journal in 1853. But nothing was known about the whereabouts of this image for more than one hundred years. During 1928-29 the Archaeological Survey of India carried out excavations at the same mound, but no mention of this image has been made in the Report published in 1933.

During 1964-65 while engaged in excavation work at Rājbandīdāngā, I came to know about a mutilated stone image in the possession of Sri Santosh Sen of Sātui village (Chumrigāchā Railway Station). I went to the residence of Sri Sen and found to my utter surprise the very image, a sketch of which was published in the Society's Journal in 1853. On inquiry, I learnt that a few years before, Sri Sen brought the image from the neighbourhood of the very place where it was witnessed by Layard. Sri Sen made a gift of the image to the Department of Archaeology of the University of Calcutta.

In 1853 Layard presented the following account of the stone image:

"A curious six-armed image was found in the bed of the tank (*Jamunā-Tālao*) some years ago and transferred to the foot of the magnificent Banyan tree at Rungamutty, where, I regret to say, it has been sadly mutilated and destroyed. It represented a figure kneeling on one knee, and is said by the people of the place to be *Beni-Ka-Thakoorain*, but I should fancy that Goddess *Kālī* is intended. The two outer and the front arms have been broken off, the centre right arm apparently holds what may have been a human victim suspended by the feet, but the object is too much injured to form any concrete idea of its original shape. The hinder right arm is in the act of drawing an arrow from a quiver suspended at the back of the Goddess, whilst the corresponding arm on the left holds the bow. The centre left arm appears to support a lotus flower or other insignia, but the upper part of the figure has been too much mutilated to trace anything correctly" (Pls. I & II).

From the illustration of the sketch of the image published in the Journal of the Society in 1853 and the one presented by Sri Sen it is evident that the two images are identical (Pls. I & II). Besides presenting a variant sketch, Layard has not also reported a faithful account of the image itself. It is, therefore, necessary to present here a true picture of the image which is now in the custody of the Department of Archaeology of the University of Calcutta.

The image made of black stone is indeed badly mutilated as reported by Layard. It is evident that the image was the victim of deliberate sharp cuts by a lethal weapon. Its total length is 4'1" (including the rectangular tang) and the maximum width of the pedestal-base is 2'7". The end of the tang is rectangular measuring 2'4" × 6".

This black stone is an adaptation in Bengal, perhaps from the Rājmahal hills. The back of the image reveals thick parallel lines which are indications of quarry-dressing. The quarry-dressed side was left untouched, and only the other side was carved into the image in relief.



The upper part of the background and right side of the image are broken. Below, the animal-head on left is also damaged, but manes on right are partly extant. The head-gear and the facial portion of the image up to its breast demonstrate a sharp cut. The pedestal-base is plain and bears some chisel or cut-marks.

The image is an eight-armed deity (not six-armed as described by Layard). The arms of the image are all damaged. On right, all arms are mutilated excepting the lower and the upper ones. The upper arm holds a quiver and the attribute of the lower one is not clear. On left, four arms are partly extant, and the first and the third arms hold lotus and bow. The deity is a dynamic standing figure. Its left leg rests on the pedestal and the right one, on the body of the animal below.

The figure is less ornamented. It wears a necklace consisting of circular beads and a hanging pendant. Both feet wear plain anklets and hands, armlets. The first arm on left wears an armlet comprising one row of beaded lines.

The drapery is plain. The whole body is wrapped in a *sāḍī* with foldings. The *sāḍī* goes round the legs exhibiting their contours and the middle one slopes down to the back of the animal below. The *mukūṭa* or head-gear, though mutilated, seems to be conical and ornamented (Pl. I).

The animal below is a double headed composite figure, buffalo and lion. On right, the buffalo head bears two prominent horns and beautifully chiselled eyes. On left, the head of the lion is damaged, but its manes are partly visible. The pedestal or the base and the tang are plain and bears only a few chisel-marks. The upper part of the background is damaged and the extant edges on right and left bear circular beaded line decoration.

On the whole, the image exhibits a graceful appearance, and the workmanship does not appear crude. The absence of old vigour and composition is noteworthy. Subtle gracefulness and loveliness are its characteristic features. The position and the pose of the figure appear to be vigorous and dynamic.

The image is a representation of *Mahishamardini* and not *Kālī* as reported by Layard. The attributes of the eight armed *Mahishamardini* are generally discus, trident, arrow, sword, index-finger, buckler, bow and hair of the demon. Here, the demon is absent and the deity stands on the animal itself. In spite of the indeterminate attributes of the present deity due to mutilation and the absence of the figure of the demon, it may be contended that the image represents the Goddess *Mahishamardini* (Pl. I).

The present double headed animal is very significant. This kind of composite animal form is very rare. The lion is the vehicle of the deity *Durgā*, and *mahisha* is the animal from which the demon came out. Here, the sculptor presented the two animals in a noble way by carving out the heads of both the buffalo and the lion on the right and left of the same animal-body. Accordingly, it may be contended that the figure represents the *Mahishamardini-Durgā*, the most popular Goddess of Bengal. Significant features of the image are: composite animal form, resting of the left leg of the deity on the pedestal, less ornamentation, graceful appearance, etc. On the basis of the extant features the image may be attributed to the seventh-eighth century A.D.

The description of the image given above differs considerably from the one presented by Layard in 1853. But from the illustrations it is clear that the two images are identical. It is, therefore, apparent that Layard did not present a faithful account of the image which he witnessed at Rāṅgāmāṭī and a sketch of which he published in the Asiatic Society's Journal in 1853 (Pls. I, II).





Black Stone Image from Rāṅgāmāṭī (removed to Sāṭui) presented to the  
Department of Archaeology, University of Calcutta.

'Black Stone Image'





*Black stone Image found in the Jummina Talao  
at Rungamutti  
On the Site of the ancient City of Karsana-puri*

Sketch of the Black Stone Image drawn by Layard and published in Asiatic Society's  
Journal, 1853





## II

### FOUNDATION HUMAN SACRIFICE

From indeterminable time, man has been observing the ritual practice of depositing sacrificed human beings, wholly or partly, and more generally the skull, in the foundation trenches of buildings or any other structures. Many legends of human sacrifice relating to the erection of embankments, building of castles or temples or houses, digging of trenches, construction of bridges, *etc.*, for imparting strength and vitality are widely current throughout the world. There are also many records of accidental or casual findings of human skulls or bone fragments during diggings or rediggings of foundations of some dilapidated buildings. But concrete archaeologically stratified records regarding foundation human sacrifice are rare.

During excavations at Rājāḍidāṅgā (Murśidābād district, West Bengal) in 1964, an extremely interesting record of the foundation human sacrifice was unearthed. This discovery relates to the finding of a fragmentary human skull lying in position in the foundation trench below an exposed wall in one of the excavated trenches (Tr. A5; Pl. I).

Digging up to a depth of 9'10" below surface, brick debris were exposed throughout the excavated area. On the removal of these bricks, a regular wall was uncovered. It was a massive wall built on layer (10) consisting of silt clay-deposition of 4" in thickness. Below layer (10), ran layers (11), (11a), (11b), (12), (12a), (13) and (14) (Pls. Ia, b; III). The nature and character of these layer-depositions are not essentially different excepting a little variation in colour. Most of these layers are, however, devoid of any evidence of human occupation. Excluding brickbats, only one pot-sherd was found lying near the skull (Pl. II, a, b). The whole deposition appeared to have been the result of an accumulation of silt laid by an inundation. The running of so many layers in this excavated area is a clear indication of disturbances, perhaps caused by the cutting of the foundation trench of the wall. The silt deposition in north-eastern corner of the cutting area of the trench ran downwards up to a depth of 12'6" below surface, and in south-eastern direction, the natural soil was exposed at a depth of 11' below surface.

At a depth of 11'2" below surface and 88.8 ft. above mean sea level and at 1'7" below the top brick course of the wall the fragmentary human skull was exposed. The skull was found lying on layer (11a), and layer (11) was the covering one. Disturbances in earth-depositions continued up to the running of layer (14). Below layer (14) was unearthed the natural soil marked as (15). Layer (11a) on which was laid the skull consisted of brickbats and a single sherd (Pl. II). It was quite evident that the skull was deliberately laid in position on layer (11a).

The area covered by the skull measured 9" × 6". The general orientation of the skull was from north to south. But the frontal portion was found lying in the south-eastern direction. The skull was found associated with brickbats and a single sherd (Pls. I & II). These are indeed foundation nodules.

The skull has been examined by Dr. S. S. Sarkar of the University of Calcutta and Dr. B. Sarkar of N.R.S. Medical College, Calcutta. Dr. S. Sarkar reported that the skull belonged to an adult male above 20 years. Its two parietal regions show slanting cut-marks joining in the shape of an inverted A with its apex being on the sagittal suture. The cut-marks on the skull indicate the use of a sharp-cutting heavy weapon. It has been also evident that cuts were inflicted one upon another. From the nature of levelling of cut-marks it may be presumed that the injuries were caused on a decapitated head. This finding of Dr. S. Sarkar has been confirmed by Dr. B. Sarkar. It follows accordingly that the head was chopped off and then its two parietal regions were cut off with a definite purpose. It is only after cutting the two parietal regions that the head was carefully laid in the foundation trench of this Phase II wall. (Pls. I, II).

The custom of burying the sacrificed human being, wholly or partly, in the foundation trench of a building has a magical virtue of rendering the structure stable and impregnable. In the present example, only a portion of the skull, the brain container, has been carefully deposited in the foundation trench. In this connection, it may be noted that this Phase II wall was built on the silt deposition. Further, on the removal of this structure, another wall built on the natural soil was also exposed. It has been found out that the first occupation at the site was destroyed by a flood from the river Bhāgirathī. Naturally so, when the second Phase structure was built, all possible steps were undertaken to make it impregnable. This human sacrifice and the deposition of the skull in the foundation trench with all associated rituals were perhaps the magical undertakings directed towards that end. On stratigraphical evidences, Phase II structure at the site is to be ascribed to c. second-fifth century A.D.\* Further, the discovery of the skull in the foundation trench is perhaps an indication of the prevalence of the Tantric Cult practices at that time.

On the strength of the contents of a large number of inscribed terracotta seals and other objects discovered during excavations, the present site of Rājbaḍḍidāṅgā has been firmly identified with the illustrious *Raktamṛittikā-vihāra* visited by Hiuen Tsang in the 7th century A.D. The monastery buildings at the site have been attributed to Phase III.

The discovery of this archaeological record of the foundation human sacrifice is the first of its kind in this part of our country. Similar records of the deposition of human skulls and bones have been also discovered during subsequent excavations at the site.

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\* S. R. Das, Rājbaḍḍidāṅgā, p. 25.





(a) Tr.A<sup>5</sup>: A general view of the Skull below the wall



(b) Tr.A<sup>5</sup>: A close view of the wall and Skull below



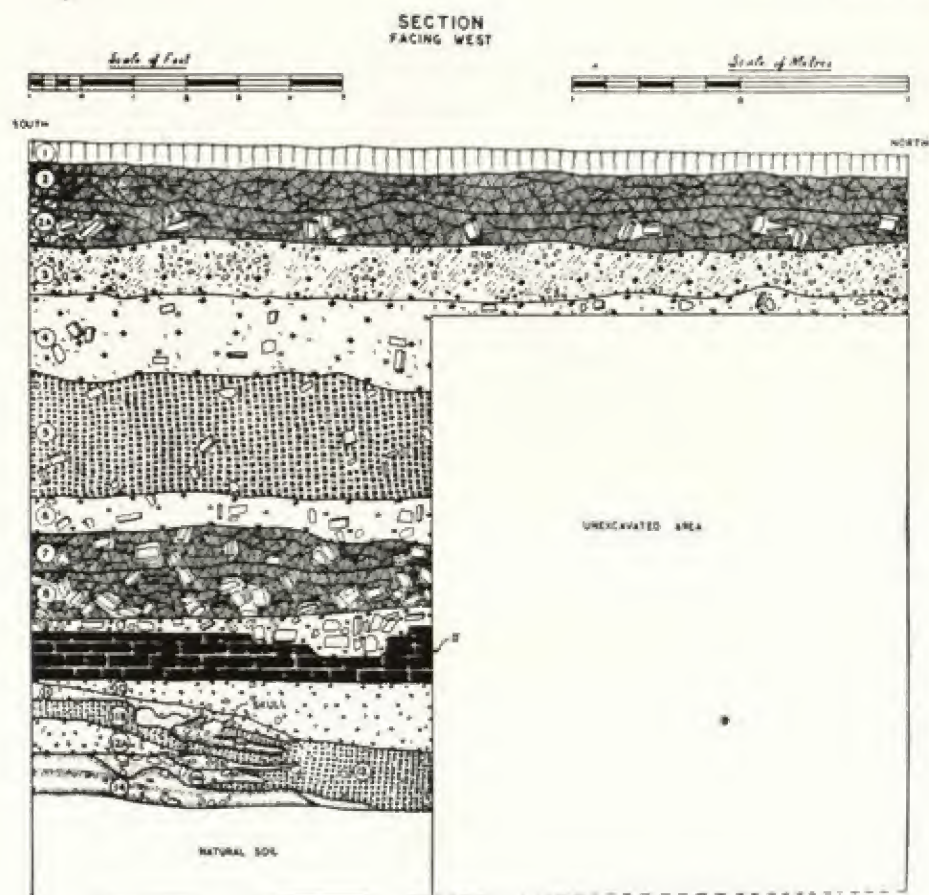
(a) Tr.A<sup>3</sup>: A close view of the Skull in the foundation trench of the wall showing the running of layers, foundation brickbats, etc.



(b) Tr.A<sup>3</sup>: Another close view of the Skull in the foundation trench of the wall showing brickbats, potsherd, etc.







(a) Tr.A<sup>3</sup>: Section facing west showing the position of the Skull and running of layers

'Foundation Human Sacrifice'





### III

## STUCCO HEADS FROM RĀJBĀḌĪDĀNGĀ

Stucco plastic modelling attained perfection during the first few centuries of the Christian era. In India, Taxila was the earliest and representative centre of the stucco art creation. The practice of stucco modelling first began at Taxila in the first century. A.D. and became an integral part of the composite art productions of the Gandhāra school. Like other Gandhāra art creations, the beginning of the stucco modelling has been attributed also to extraneous origins. The stucco art at Taxila reached its highest excellence in the fourth century A.D.

In eastern India, Nālandā, Rājgir and parts of Bengal yielded examples of stucco art production. The stucco art creations from Bengal are exemplified by a few specimens comprising both casual and excavated finds. Significant casual finds were recovered from the districts of Rājsāhi and Murśidābād. While ploughing a field in the village named Tejanandī, Rājsāhi district, a fairly large head was found. The specimen is now in the custody of Prof. S. K. Saraswati. Besides, two heads were recovered from Murśidābād district, and they are now preserved in the West Bengal State Archaeological gallery and Ashutosh Museum. One of these stucco heads was found while digging the foundation trench of a school building in the village Madhupur, near Chirupī Railway Station.

In Bengal, excavated examples of stucco art creations including stucco heads came from Rākshasidāngā (Murśidābād district) and Pāhāḍpur (Rājsāhi district). The excavation at Rākshasidāngā during 1928-29 yielded no less than ninety-five stucco fragments of which at least five to six are reported to be the heads of the Buddha. Several examples of stucco heads were also recovered during excavations at Pāhāḍpur. But the stratigraphical sequences of these findings from Rākshasidāngā and Pāhāḍpur are not known.

In recent years, the excavations at Rājbaḍiḍāngā (Murśidābād district) in 1962 and 1964 yielded several stucco heads and mouldings. Here, the discovery of two stucco heads in 1962 is communicated with comments. The illustrated stucco head No: (a) (Pl. I) is partly damaged. The top of the head, and its left side, upper portion of the nose and lower part of the chin are lost. The specimen displays wide forehead and hair-indications are absent. The total breadth of the head is 53 mm. The left eye is damaged, and the right one is extant. The eye is a long horizontal one. The upper eye-lid is thick, raised and bold. Indications of eye-brows are absent. The upper part of the nose is broken. Though the nasion is damaged, the nose appears to be sunken at the root. Its wings are broad and the nostrils have narrow but deep openings. The nasal height and width measure 25 mm. and 19 mm. The mouth is indicated by a deep longitudinal cut. The upper and lower lips are thick and a little everted. Only the ear on right is extant. The ear is a long and broad one measuring 23 mm. in length and 21 mm. in breadth. The face is broad and the chin is markedly present.

The example No. (b) is also a fragmentary one. Its right side and the top of the head are damaged. Only the left side of the head is well preserved. The frontal portion of the head is not so wide as in specimen No. (a). The top of the head is damaged, but there are traceable indications of hair consisting of deep cut-lines. The left eye and the inner canthus of the right one are extant. The eye is long and narrow measuring 17 mm. in length and 4 mm. in breadth. The eye-lid is not very prominent. The eye-form is extremely elegant and pleasing.



The example has a fine, long and straight nose. Its wings are not so wide, and the nose is not sunken at the root. It is straight from nasion to its tip. The length and breadth of the nose are 17 mm. and 12 mm. respectively. The nostrils have been separated from the upper lip by sharp cut-lines without showing deep openings. The mouth has been displayed by another cut. The lips are not thick, and the lower one is short and bold. The chin is well-marked.

Distinctive features of these two stucco heads may be thus compared:

- (i) The specimen No. (a) is larger than No. (b)
- (ii) The frontal portion of No. (a) is wider than that of No. (b).
- (iii) Eye-forms and eye-lids of the two specimens also differ.
- (iv) The nose of No. (b) is straight, long and pointed and that of No. (a) is broad and perhaps sunken at the root.
- (v) Wings of the nose of No. (a) are broader than those of No. (b).
- (vi) Nostrils are absent in No. (a).
- (vii) The mouth-cut of No. (a) is wider and deeper than that of No. (b).
- (viii) Hair-indications are absent in No. (a), but traceable in No. (b).
- (ix) The face of No. (b) is not so broad as that of No. (a).

On the whole, the specimen No. (b) displays a fine and graceful appearance. But the modelling of both the heads represents skilful handling. In spite of certain dissimilarities in facial expressions of these two heads, the techniques of making and finishing are all alike.

From the physical features of these two stucco heads, it appears that they perhaps represent two distinct ethnic types. The determination of ethnic types from sculptural representations would be, however, unscientific. But the general form and ethnic peculiarities can be well discerned and certain conclusions may be drawn. The art creation is a traditional one and the forms and features are mostly conventional. In respect of these two examples, it can be said that they represent two ethnic types, coarse and graceful.

Unfortunately, these two stucco heads were recovered from a huge deposition of debris consisting of innumerable pot-sherds and other minor antiquities including a metal *Dharmachakra* belonging to c. seventh-eighth century A.D. On stratigraphical and other evidences at the site, these two stucco heads are to be attributed to cultural Period II dating from c. fifth-sixth century to ninth-tenth century A.D.\* During subsequent excavations several excellent examples of stucco heads were also recovered from stratified levels. One of these heads, a large and crude one, was retrieved from a lower level belonging to c. fourth century A.D., and other examples are to be attributed to culture Period II. The stratigraphical datings assigned to the stucco heads are also attested by the stylistic consideration.

Like those in Taxila and other places, the Buddhist shrines uncovered at Rājbaḍidāṅgā were also externally plastered with lime and adorned with stucco mouldings and heads.

The problem connected with the stucco heads from Rājbaḍidāṅgā is primarily the question of determining the origin and development of the art of stucco modelling in Bengal. It is generally believed that the techniques of stucco art creations in different parts of India diffused from Taxila. In general, the stucco heads from Rājbaḍidāṅgā display elegant features of the Gupta sculptural art. In material compositions, techniques of making and in other essentials the Rājbaḍidāṅgā stucco heads differ primarily from their Taxila counterparts. If the stucco art from Taxila reached its excellence

\* See S. R. Das, *Rājbaḍidāṅgā*, p. 25.

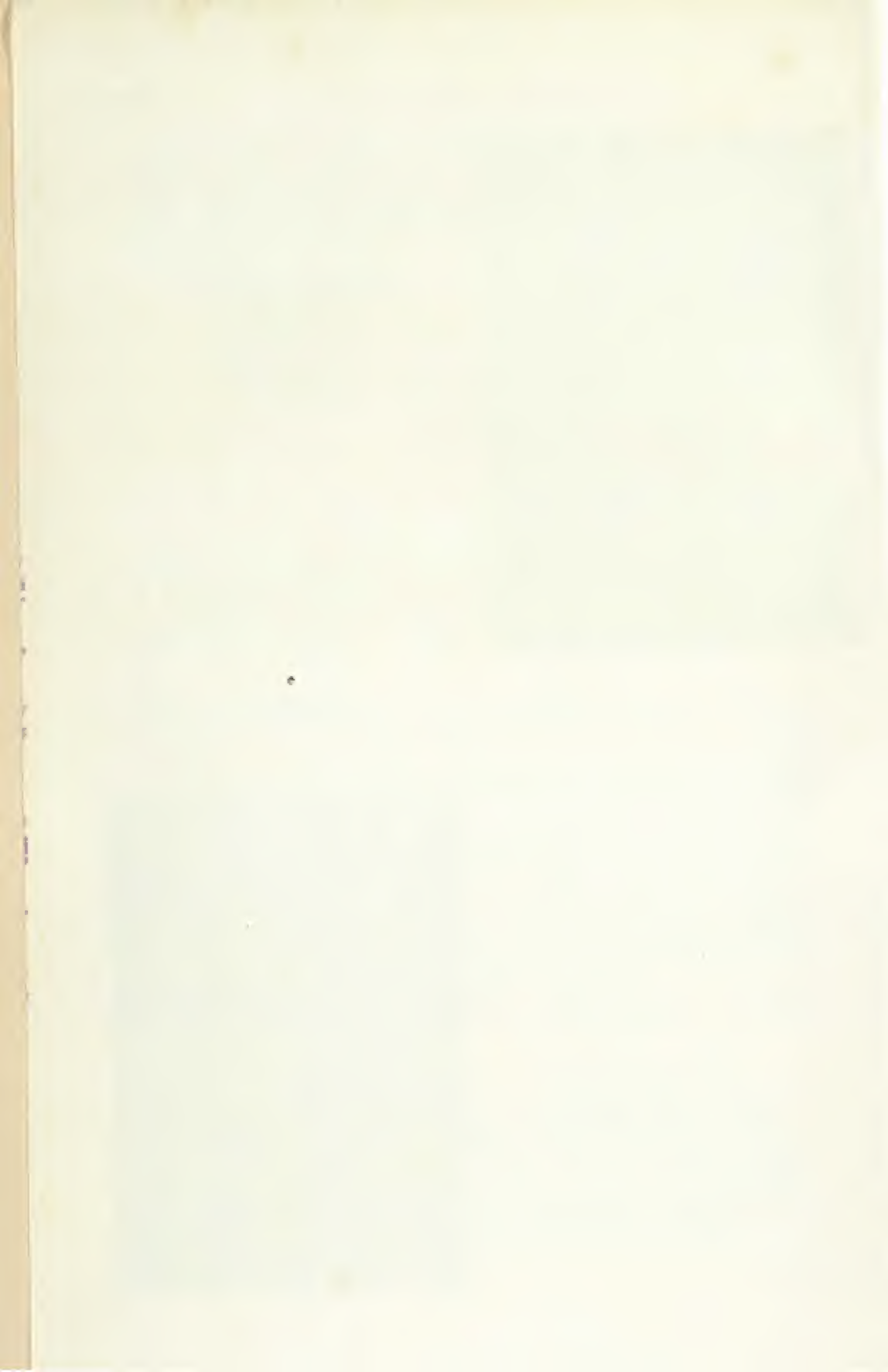


(a) Front view of Stucco Head No. 1  
from Rājbadidaṅgā



(b) Profile of Stucco Head No. 2  
from Rājbadidaṅgā





in the fourth century A.D. and declined subsequently, the diffusion possibly took place after this period. But Rājbaḍḍidāṅgā produced one extremely interesting coarse specimen from the earliest level belonging to c. fourth century A.D. Accordingly, it appears that the development of stucco modellings at Rājbaḍḍidāṅgā is almost contemporaneous with those of Taxila. It is suggested that the stucco art in Bengal had a local and perhaps an independent origin. These stucco art creations at Rājbaḍḍidāṅgā are indeed the handiworks of the local craftsman.

The popularity of the stucco art creation is to be associated with the growth and spread of the *Mahāyāna* Buddhism and the establishment of the Buddhist *stūpas* and monasteries. By about the fifth century A.D., more and more creations of the Buddha images came to be regarded as works of great merit and the goal of salvation and hence, arose the widespread practice of erecting shrines and *stūpas* adorned with innumerable images of the Buddha. This is what happened in Bengal as well. But this stucco art in Bengal did not long continue. After the eighth-ninth century A.D., the stucco art in Bengal declined and its place was perhaps taken by the terracotta art production.

#### IV

### DISCOVERY OF A METAL DHARMACHAKRA

Adoration and actual worship of *Dharmachakra* (Wheel of Law), singly or along with other representations, was a central theme in both early and late Buddhism. But unfortunately, only a very few concrete specimens of *Dharmachakra* and solid archaeological records of its independent worship are known in India. Here, the discovery of an excellent example of a metal *Dharmachakra* is communicated with comments.

The present specimen is a cast from mould, and the material is *ashṭa-dhātu*. (Pl. Ia, b). The total length of the *Chakra* including its base and projection below is  $3\frac{1}{4}$ ". The *Chakra* has a floral pedestal base with volutes of leaves which carry the wheel aloft. Volute of leaves have not been, however, uniformly represented on both sides of the pedestal base. The ascending axis or the stalk holding volutes of leaves has a rounded flat base marked with criss-cross lines. The diameter of the wheel is  $1\frac{3}{4}$ " and its inner circle containing the spokes has a diameter of  $1\frac{1}{4}$ ". The weight of the *Chakra* is 148 gm. There are eight spokes radiating from the central block or nave. The central point of the nave bears a rounded protuberance or knob of  $\frac{1}{4}$ " in length. Each spoke measures  $\frac{7}{16}$ "  $\times$   $\frac{1}{4}$ ", and the stalk is  $\frac{3}{8}$ " in length, and the diameter of its flat ring-base is  $\frac{7}{16}$ ". The maximum breadth of the volutes of leaves below the *Chakra* is  $2\frac{1}{8}$ ". The *Chakra* is elaborately ornamented. Its border bears a chain of beaded decoration all around with five studs, two on right, two on left and one at the top in the central position. Both sides of the *Chakra* are similar excepting a little variation in foliage patterns below.

The spokes of the wheel have been made to resemble petals of a lotus and below, is the stem with volutes of leaves and flowers. The *Chakra* with its petal-like spokes represents an eight petalled full blown lotus. This metal wheel standing on a pedestal ornamented with floral motifs and vegetal devices is to be identified with the Buddhist *Dharmachakra*. The wheel and the lotus are pre-Buddhist symbols and both are also commonly associated with the Brahmanical deities.

The wheel or *Dharmachakra* is found frequently represented in Buddhist reliefs. But the extant finds of *Dharmachakra* and evidences of its independent worship are very few. An interesting instance of the *Dharmachakra*-worship is found in Sāñchi reliefs. At the top of a panel, the *Chakra* is found on a pedestal flanked by the devotees. But it is Amarāvati which has yielded a beautiful specimen of a stone *Dharmachakra* on a pillar flanked by devotees with folded hands and *Devas* with offerings. This specimen belongs to c. 100 A.D. Another large stone *Dharmachakra* has been discovered from Liṅgarājupalem (Viśākhapatnam district). Its diameter is  $3'4"$  and the tenon measures  $6\frac{1}{2}" \times 7"$ . The tenon was perhaps meant to fit it into a mortise. The border of the *Chakra* is well decorated with alternating *triratna* and leaf motifs. A beautiful *Dharmachakra* has been also discovered from Pāhāḍpur (North Bengal).

The metal *Chakra* under discussion was discovered during excavations at Rājbadidāṅgā (Mursidābād district) conducted by the University Department of Archaeology. The specimen is a complete one. It was retrieved from layer ③ at a depth of  $5'6"$  below surface. The same layer yielded also two stucco heads of the Gupta period, fine polished sherds and other rich minor antiquities. On the strength of stratigraphical records and datable finds, this *Chakra* may be attributed to c. seventh-eighth century A.D.



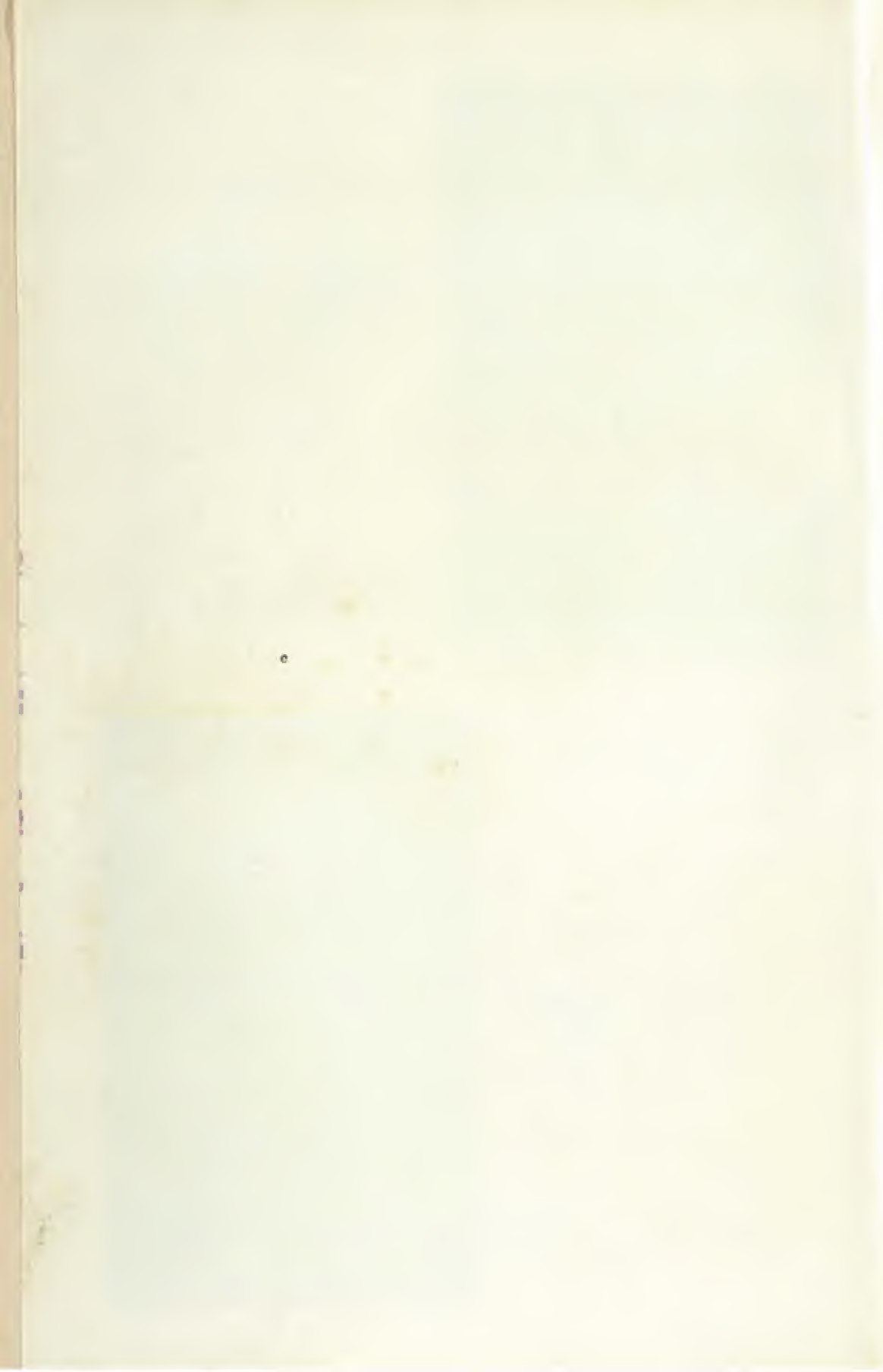


(a)

(a) and (b) Both faces of metal *Dharmachakra* discovered from Rājbaḍḍiāṅgā, Muršidābād District, West Bengal.



(b)



Several specimens of stone *Dharmachakra* are known from South-east Asia, more particularly from Siam. One example from Prapatom bears a pedestal with a lotus flower and volutes of leaves. This specimen has been ascribed to the fifth-sixth century A.D., perhaps a little later. Many more examples of the stone *Dharmachakra* have been also recovered from Dvārāvati and other sites. Some finer examples from these places were carved in the round. This reminds us of their Indian counterparts.

*Dharmachakras* from Amarāvati, Viśākhapatnam, Siam and other sites are all in stone. But very little is known about any metal *Dharmachakra* and its independent worship. It appears that at first, stone *Dharmachakra* was only worshipped and subsequently, with the introduction of metal-casting in some centres, the *Chakra* was produced in metal. Rājibāḍidāṅgā was also such a metal-casting centre. This is also attested by the discovery of bronze figures of the Buddha and Gaṇeśa.

It is quite likely that the practice of carving *Dharmachakra* in stone and its independent worship travelled to South-east Asia either from Amarāvati or *Raktamṛttikā*. In this context, a reference may be made to an inscription from Malaya Peninsula, which speaks of the great navigator Buddhagupta, a native of *Raktamṛttikā*, who travelled to Malaya Peninsula for trade. This *Raktamṛttikā* is now to be firmly identified with Rājibāḍidāṅgā, the site under excavation. During excavations at the site many inscribed terracotta sealings bearing the name of *Raktamṛttikā* has been discovered. Some of these seals were the official tokens of the *Raktamṛttikā-Vihāra*\*. The illustrious *Raktamṛttikā* monastery visited by Hiuen Tsang in the seventh century A.D. might have also played an important role in the diffusion of Buddhism in South-east Asia.

The discovery of this metal *Dharmachakra* from Rājibāḍidāṅgā is unique of its kind. Independent worship of this *Chakra* is attested by its nature and form. It follows also that the worship of *Dharmachakra* singly was perhaps practised by certain Buddhist sects of the great *Raktamṛttikā* monastery which is to be identified with Rājibāḍidāṅgā. In the absence of its counterpart in any other centre, it may be contended that the *Chakra* was a local product. This metal *Dharmachakra* is perhaps the only known example of its kind. From all these points of view, the discovery of this metal *Dharmachakra* from Rājibāḍidāṅgā bears a great historical import.

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\* S. R. Das, *Rājibāḍidāṅgā*, pp. 58-59.



## A MINIATURE BRONZE HEAD

The present communication deals with the recovery of a remarkable miniature bronze head, perhaps of a Buddhist divinity, from Rājbaḍidāṅgā (Mursidābād district, West Bengal).

The head is an unstratified find recovered from a dump. It is a small head measuring 2.3 cm. in length. The head is corroded and slightly damaged, more particularly the eye on left.

This bronze head is characterized by elongated face, rounded cheek, sharply projecting and pointed nose, long ear-lobes and pointed chin. The lips are short and medium in thickness; the lower one is a little everted. The head wears a crown with beaded decoration below. The hair-dressing is conventional and consists of a semi-circular twisted knot at the back (Pl. I).

In general, the head displays sharp and charming features. Its countenance is extremely impressive and lovely. The style is mature and indicates the working of a master-hand. In certain respects, the head is reminiscent of the classical Gupta art-creation. It also reminds one of some bronze figures from Nālandā and Kurkihār.

Iconographic identification of this miniature bronze head is uncertain. The present specimen resembles, though not exactly, the two bronze heads from Nālandā, now preserved in the National Museum. One of these two heads from Nālandā has been identified with the Buddhist divinity *Tārā* and the other, with *Hārītī*. It may be suggested that the present miniature female head from Rājbaḍidāṅgā might represent either of these two Buddhist divinities, more particularly that of *Tārā*. In this connection, it is extremely interesting to note that a complete bronze figure of *Tārā* has been also recovered from Maināmatī. The present head resembles considerably the head of the Maināmatī example.

The head of *Hārītī* from Nālandā belonged to the reigning period of Devapāla (ninth century A.D.). But the head of *Tārā* displays certain features which indicate an earlier date, i.e., eighth century A.D. This lovely miniature bronze head from Rājbaḍidāṅgā may be also tentatively ascribed to c. eighth-ninth century A.D. This dating of the specimen under discussion agrees well with the stratified bronze figures of the Buddha and Gaṇeśa recovered during excavations at the site in 1964-65.



(a) Profile of the Bronze Head

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(b) Front view of the Bronze Head

'A Miniature Bronze Head'





## VI

### DISCOVERY OF AN INSCRIBED FRAGMENTARY STONE PEDESTAL

The present discussion relates to the discovery of a black stone pedestal bearing an inscription, human figures and foliage devices executed in low and high relief. While conducting archaeological explorations during 1965-66 in the Rāḍha tract on the western side of the Bhāgīrathī in the district of Murśidābād, the present stone pedestal was found partially imbedded along with many other fragmentary carved stones under a banyan tree in the open field, near the village Bhaṅgā Milkī (Murśidābād) (Pl. 1a).

This pedestal of black stone measuring 14" × 9" in *pañcharatha* form, both in its upper and lower parts, is quite in conformity with five images whose feet are extant on five *padmapīṭhas*. The representations on the pedestal have been well executed in low and high relief on its three parts. The upper part bears five *padmapīṭhas* (lotus-seats) in a row; the central one is the largest, and others are smaller in sizes and lower in grades of relief. Each *padmapīṭha* composed of a double inverted full blown lotus bears one pair of beautiful carved feet. Five toes on each foot have been prominently indicated by incised cut-lines. Each foot wears again nicely carved anklets indicated by double bands composed of dots, and two pairs of anklets on immediate right and left have been shown by single dotted bands. But the anklets on last two pairs of feet on extreme right and left have been represented by plain bands. The size of each of the images can be conceived from the sizes of feet resting on lotus seats. Besides, on left and right of the central *padmapīṭha*, there are two lotus-representations executed in relief (Pl. 1b).

On the front-surface of the upper central *ratha* measuring 4½" × ½" and beneath the central *padmapīṭha*, a short inscription in one line is extant:

श्रीमद्वक्त्र ॥

The inscription from left to right ends with two vertical strokes and it reads: *Śrīmadvākasya*, i.e., of Śrīmadvāka; perhaps the deity belonged to the prosperous or glorious *VĀKA* (a personal name). The letters of the inscription are in characters of c. tenth-eleventh century A.D. (Pl. 1b).

The front-surface of the central part of the pedestal below the *padmapīṭhas* is fully covered by foliage devices and human figures carved in bold relief. The vegetal and floral devices have been all well executed in luxurious curves. In spite of exuberent and luxurious curves, a perfect balance has been maintained. Below the central *ratha* bearing the inscription, there is the representation of a short stylised flower flanked perhaps by two floral devices or mythical figures carved in relief. These two figures appear to have been executed in a conventional style with short arms, prominent breast and long hair projecting backward, and its lower portion has been carved in conformity with the vegetal devices. But the representations might be conventional floral devices as well. Just below two *padmapīṭhas*, on left and right of the central one, there are two kneeling figures with folded hands and facing each other with a little frontward turning of their heads. These

are indeed two *Garuḍa* devotees. The surface of the bottom *pañcharatha* has been left completely blank (Pl. I6). From the middle of the pedestal protrudes a tapering projection (measuring  $3\frac{1}{2}'' \times 4''$  and narrower end,  $\frac{1}{4}''$ ) meant for fixation of the image. The back portion of the pedestal is fully covered by chisel-marks.

The identification of the images standing on the *padmapīṭhas* of this pedestal cannot be firmly determined on the basis of the extant feet alone. But on the analogy of similar other pedestals with extant images, the iconic representations on this example can be identified. Here, attention may be drawn to two Viṣṇu images from Bengal and one from Mathurā. The pedestals of these images resemble in minute details the present example. The *pañcharatha* form, *padmapīṭhas*, devotees beneath the second lotus seat on left and right of the central one, luxuriant foliage and vegetal devices, etc., are mostly alike in form and treatment. But in Nākkatitalā (Lālbāg, Muṣṣidābād) example the central figure in the middle portion of the pedestal below the central upper *ratha* and *padmapīṭha* is a kneeling devotee facing front with folded hands. But the pedestal of the Viṣṇu image from Suṇḍarvan (now preserved in the Indian Museum) is in many respects similar to the present one. The central floral motif, devotees beneath the *padmapīṭhas* on left and right of the middle one, vegetal devices, etc., are all alike. But this example does not bear any inscription, and the floral devices differ a little in minute details. There is, however, another exactly identical pedestal of the Viṣṇu image in the Indian Museum. It bears also a short inscription on the surface of the central *ratha* of the lower part and not on the upper *ratha* like the present one.

In all the above examples, the central deity is the *Sthānakamūrti* of Viṣṇu holding *śaṁkha*, *chakra*, *gadā* and *padma* standing on the central *padmapīṭha*. Viṣṇu is flanked by two deities holding *padma* and *vinā* respectively. They are standing in playful *bhaṅgas*. These two figures are to be identified with Lakṣmī and Sarasvatī. On left and right of Lakṣmī and Sarasvatī, there are two other standing figures, Jayā and Vijayā. They are all the *parivāra-devatās* (family deities) of Viṣṇu. On the strength of the analogy of carvings on the pedestal and five pairs of feet on five *padmapīṭhas*, the central deity and other *devatās* on the lotus-thrones of the present example may be well identified with Viṣṇu and his *parivāradevatās*.

There are only a few inscribed images from Bengal and the discovery of the present example is indeed an important addition. Its sculptured figures, ornamentations, carving of luxuriant foliages and vegetal devices, etc., correspond to the art-creation of the Pāla School of Eastern India. The ascription of this kind of Viṣṇu images to the Pāla School is attested by the inscription on the present pedestal as described above, and it is to be attributed to c. tenth-eleventh century A.D.





(a) Stone sculpture fragments including the inscribed one lying under a banyan tree



(b) Stone Pedestal with inscription on the surface of the central *Ratha*

'Inscribed Stone Pedestal'





## STONE IMAGES OF VISHṆU FROM MURŚIDĀBĀD DISTRICT

Several stone images of Vishṇu have been recovered from different parts of the district of Murśidābād, West Bengal. The present report relates to hitherto unrecorded three black stone images of Vishṇu, two of which have been recently acquired by the Department of Archaeology of the University of Calcutta from the village named Amṛitakuṇḍa (Amarkuṇḍa), Mursidābād district (Fig. I).

During archaeological reconnaissance in the Rāḍha tract on the western side of the Bhāgirathī we came across an old dilapidated brick temple by the side of the house of the priest Sri Harakumar Misra of the village Amṛitakuṇḍa (Pl. V (b) of the Introduction). The roof of the temple has fallen down. But its front portion with lime-plaster is extant. The stone lintel and door-jambs are elaborately ornamented. The jamb on the left side of the door bears a short figure inside a carved niche. The upper portion of the temple as illustrated in Pl. V (of the Introduction) presents its complete picture in ruins.

It was learnt from the local sources that the said temple was built long ago by the villagers and that on its decay, the enshrined images were removed to the outer apartment of the priest's house. About a dozen of large and small images (three of which partly damaged or broken) were found arranged in a single row upon one wooden platform. Through the courtesy of Sri Dharendra Nath Bag, two partly damaged Vishṇu images were presented by the priest Sri Misra and the villagers to the Department of Archaeology. Sri Misra informed us that all these images were recovered from a nearby tank where they were thrown by the devotees on the approach of Kālāpāhāḍ. Besides the images acquired by the Department, another image of Vishṇu under worship was photographed there for a comparative study.

Both the images presented to the Department are partly damaged. The lower portion on left of the image No. 3 (Pl. III) was found missing at the time of its acquisition. From the village Mādhuniā several stone sculpture fragments were also acquired through the courtesy of Sri Dharendra Nath Bag. After returning to Calcutta, while examining those fragments, a broken part of a black stone image was found. From the nature of the broken part, I presumed that it might be the missing portion of the very image acquired from the village Amṛitakuṇḍa. The presumption was found correct, and the broken part was affixed in good order. The said image of Vishṇu is now in perfect condition (Pl. III).

All the three images of Vishṇu under discussion here were carved out of hard black stone obtained from the Rājmaḥal hills. The image No. 1 (Pl. Ia) with its plain-cut rectangular stele measures 9" × 4". Its right side and lower part are partly broken. The central figure is moderately ornamented and wears a conical crown. The main figure with its characteristic round face and broad nose is flanked by two attendant figures, the one on left is only extant. Above the side figures are the representations of two tigers (*śārdūla*), one on each side. At the top of the stele, the central vegetal device is flanked by two full bloomed lotuses. The central figure wears a necklace consisting of three beaded chains with a hanging locket. The girdle is plainly ornamented. The *vanamālā* (a garland or chaplet made of wild flowers) hangs down up to the knee. The drapery-folding has been indicated by prominent slanting lines with a row of beads inside each of the lowermost ones. Four hands of the figure hold the usual attributes. The *gadā* (mace) held by



the lower left hand rests on the lotus seat. The crudely carved pedestal is perhaps *triratha* in form. The central figure and the extant side figures rest on crudely carved lotus seats. The side figure on left stands in a *bhaṅga* posture. Its face is also rounded and the head wears a beaded ring. Behind the central figure is the carved trefoil device resting on two horizontal lines above the side figures on both sides. In general, the workmanship of the image is not of a very high order, and its dating on stylistic grounds is most problematic. But in consideration of the nature and form of the stele the image may be ascribed to c. eighth century A.D.

The image No. 2 (Pl. II) consists of a tapering or conical stele with two flying figures (*vidyādhara*s) on both sides and *Kīrtimukha* in the centre, *pañcharatha* pedestal and moderately ornamented central and side figures resting on lotus seats. The central lotus seat rests on vegetal devices flanked by two kneeling Garuḍa figures with folded hands. The face of the central figure is oval and the nose is long and pointed. The head wears a conical crown and the ear-lobes hang downwards. Four hands of the main figure hold the usual attributes. The *gadā* (mace) and *chakra* (wheel) are held by the left upper and lower hands and *śaṅkha* and *padma* by the hands on right. The *vanamālā* covers the knee. The ornamentation consisting of necklace, armlets, bangles, etc., have been most moderately carved. The drapery-foldings have been indicated by beautifully carved lines. Four side figures are in usual *bhaṅga* postures, and their drapery extends up to the ankle. The pedestal is simple and bears little decoration. The tapering tang-projection is meant for insertion. On stylistic grounds, the image may be attributed to c. tenth century A.D.

The example No. 3 (Pl. III) is a typical Viṣṇu image belonging to the Pāla-Sena period. It measures  $1'10\frac{1}{2}" \times 10\frac{1}{2}"$ . The pedestal, stele and carved figures are all profusely ornamented. The *pañcharatha* pedestal bearing five lotus seats is luxuriously decorated with floral and vegetal devices. The kneeling Garuḍa figures with folded hands are similar to those of the image No. 2. The elaborately decorated conical stele with its tapering end bears carved figures of animals and birds on both sides. At the middle portion of the stele above the side figures there are two horizontal lines on which rest elephants, tigers, front portions of the *makara* and *haṁsas* holding a flower replica or pearl necklace (*gaja-śārdūla-makara-haṁsa*), one above another in succession from the lower part. The central figure bears a lovely facial expression with a long and sharp nose and wears a profusely ornamented trefoil conical crown, beaded necklaces, armlets, bangles, girdle and hip ornaments, *vanamālā*, etc., all displaying fine workmanship. The *vanamālā* hangs below the knee. The drapery is also elaborately decorated. The attributes are held differently—different from the patterns of holding in images Nos. 2 and 1. The upper and lower hands on right hold *gadā* and *śaṅkha* and those on left, *chakra* and *padma*. The side figures also display fine workmanship and their drapery touches the ankle as in image No. 2. They stand in their usual *bhaṅga* poses. But the posture is different from that of the image No. 2. The tang-projection is shorter than that of the image No. 2.

The central figure in all these three examples is the four-armed Viṣṇu, each hand holding the usual attributes, *śaṅkha*, *chakra*, *gadā* and *padma*. But the pattern of holding the attributes is not uniform in these three examples. The downward extent of the *vanamālā* in the three images is also different: up to the knee in image No. 1, covering the knee in image No. 2 and below the knee in image No. 3. In images Nos. 2 and 3 Viṣṇu is represented along with his four *parivāradēvatīs* (family deities). But in image No. 1 we have only two attendant deities (of which the one on left is only extant). The carved figures of image No. 3 bear clean-cut features and luxurious ornamentation.





(a) Image No. 1: Black stone image of Vishnu from Amritakunda.



(b) Amritakunda: Temple in ruins with extant ornamented stone lintel and door jambs.

'Stone image and temple.'





Image No. 2: Black stone Vishnu image from Amṛitakuṇḍa.

‘Stone image of Vishnu.’







Image No. 3: Black stone Vishnu image from Amṛitakuṇḍa.

‘Stone image of Vishnu.’





The pedestals of the images Nos. 2 and 3 are alike; the pedestal of No. 2 bears, however, a moderate decoration. But the pedestal of the image No. 1 is perhaps *triratha* in form without the usual decoration and Garuḍa figures. The stele of the images Nos. 2 and 3 are conical. But the stele of the image No. 1 is a plain-cut rectangular block of stone bearing little decorative devices. Further, the stele of the image No. 3 is elaborately decorated with carved figures of animals and birds on both sides. These are absent in image No. 2.

Stylistically, these three images may be attributed to a period ranging from c. eighth century A.D. to c. eleventh-twelfth century A.D. The characteristic features of these images delineate the evolutionary trends in stone sculptural representations of Viṣṇu in Bengal. Of the three images of Viṣṇu, No. 1 is the earliest one (c. eighth century A.D.) and the image No. 3 is the latest in dating (c. eleventh-twelfth century A.D.). The image No. 2 is to be placed in between the dating of these two images, *i.e.*, c. tenth century A.D. The image No. 3 is similar to many other stone images of Viṣṇu recovered from different parts of Bengal.

In this connection, an interesting reference may be made to the discovery of an inscribed fragmentary pedestal of a stone image of Viṣṇu, a report on which was communicated to the Society's monthly meeting in December, 1968. On palaeographical grounds, the said inscribed pedestal is to be attributed to c. eleventh-twelfth century A.D. (pages 39-40). This inscribed pedestal is almost analogous to the pedestal of the present image No. 3 (Pl. III). Accordingly, the image No. 3 may be confidently attributed to the same period.

The recovery of a good number of stone images of Viṣṇu from different parts of the Rāḍha tract of the district of Murśidābād discloses the revival of Brahmanism, more particularly of the worship of Viṣṇu, during the later part of the Pāla rule in Bengal.

## VIII

### A FRIEZE OF TERRACOTTA BIRDS

The present dissertation relates to the discovery of one hitherto unrecorded terracotta frieze of birds, along with certain observations on their identification, dating and purpose.

The frieze under discussion contains a row of terracotta plaques. Each plaque measuring  $4.01 \times 4.01$  cm. bears the representation of a single bird (Pl. I; Pl. II). All the plaques illustrated here were retrieved singly from an area measuring  $8' \times 8'$  in one particular trench (Tr. B<sup>5</sup>) during excavations at Rājbaḍḍidāṅgā (Murśidābād district, West Bengal). Altogether twelve pieces were recovered and after mending these fragments, it was found that they form parts of a long band comprising birds arranged in pairs (Pl. II).

The birds on these square plaques are all alike. It implies that they were all extracts from one particular mould. The frieze is incomplete and only ten pieces could be mended. The band thus mended consists of ten plaques, each containing one bird (Pl. II). Two such jointed plaques form the complete picture of a pair of birds. The birds on two jointed plaques stand face to face, almost touching each other's bills holding strings of beads or pearls, and each pair of birds again stand back to back in a row (Pls. I, II).

The bird is a short one measuring 3.00 cm. in length. Its mouth has been indicated by a cut dividing the culmen into two ridges, the upper one being thicker than the lower. It has a long and gracefully carved neck. The eye has been portrayed by a deep incised circle with a bold dot inside. It appears that the hair of the bird has been made into a tuft. It has a fan-shaped tail covert. The legs are short with webbed foot toes. Its plumage was originally pure white. This is firmly attested by the extant traces of white colour-coating (Pl. I).

It is indeed extremely difficult to identify the bird represented on the band in pairs. Judging from its size, bill, curved neck, legs, webbed toes, plumage and other physical characters, the bird in question may be identified with the *hamsa* (goose or swan). But the difficulty arises in regard to the presence of the tuft of hair. In earlier times, the goose used to be represented in its natural form. But in later periods, its form became considerably stylized. The tuft of hair, fan-shaped foliated tail, etc., might be recognized as conventionalized forms.

The *hamsa* figures prominently in both Brahmanical and Buddhist literature and art-creations as a sacred bird. In the *Rigveda*, the *hamsa* is described as the vehicle of Aświns. But in the epics and the *Purāṇas*, this bird is the *vāhana* of Brahmā, the God of creation. From the *Mahābhārata* it is learnt that Prajāpati taking the form of a *hamsa* pervaded the world. In the *Upanishads*, the *hamsa* stands for *ātman*.

In the Buddhist texts, the *hamsa* is the most honourable and sacred bird of excellence. In Buddhism, the goose is very closely associated with the enlightenment of the Buddha. From the *Jātakas*, it is learnt that *Bodhisattva* was reborn in the form of a *hamsa*. Besides, the geese are also recognized as ardent disciples of the Buddha. Because of the bird's close association with the Buddha and Buddhism, the *hamsa* is found most commonly represented in Buddhist art-creations, both sculpture and painting.

Beginning from the Maurya period, the *hamsa* figures in various patterns on pillars, caskets, building platforms and also in paintings. The Mauryan pillars at Lauriya-Nandangarh, Sāñchi and Rāmpurwā bear the representa-





Terracotta Birds from Rājādhānā:

- (a) Two separate pieces of terracotta birds as retrieved during excavations.  
 (b) A pair of birds formed after mending.







Rājāpāṇḍitāngā: A frieze of terracotta birds after mending.







(a)



(b)

Rājibādīdāngā: Tr. B<sup>5</sup>:

(a) Cuttings: Section facing north showing the layer deposition yielding terracotta birds.

(b) Cuttings: Section facing north showing deep digging in the trench up to the natural soil.





tions of the geese in their natural forms. From Kāshmir an admirably decorated platform bearing a wonderful representation of the procession of geese, each holding a lotus stalk and walking from left to right, has been discovered. The Anurādhāpur (Ceylon) 'Moon-stone' contains also a remarkable illustration of a procession of geese. In South Indian art-products of the Pallava period the geese appear prominently. The Sāñchi and Eran pillars of the Gupta period also contain representations of geese. Even in paintings, the drawing of the *hamsa* is a common device.

In respect of the terracotta *hamsas*, a particular reference may be made here to those discovered during excavations at Pāhādpur (Rājsāhi district) and Maināmati (Comilla)—both in East Pakistan. The Pāhādpur examples are found in various postures, *such as*, at rest, at toilet, *etc.*, and also holding strings of beads or pearls. The wings of the bird have been sometime treated in a conventional pattern. The Maināmati examples are almost similar to those from Pāhādpur. But the Pāhādpur and Maināmati terracotta *hamsas* are different in form and character from the Rājāḍidāngā examples under discussion.

The present examples of terracotta *hamsas* were recovered from stratified diggings at Rājāḍidāngā. All the pieces were retrieved from one particular layer deposition (3) at a depth of 3'4" below surface (Pl. III). The associated finds comprised fine polished sherds, stucco heads, inscribed terracotta seals and sealings, *etc.* On the strength of the inscribed terracotta seals, the level yielding terracotta birds may be confidently ascribed to c. sixth-eighth century A.D.

Originally, these terracotta fragments of *hamsas* formed a band with rows of these birds, perhaps used as a decorative pattern bearing religious significance. The band was fixed on the body of an earthen pot, possibly a sacred vessel. This presumption is fully borne out by the extant parts of the rim of the vessel at the top of two plaques (Pl. I). Further, the nature of the reverse surface of these plaques reveals that they were originally fixed on an earthen vessel.

This kind of representation of *hamsas* on the body of a sacred vessel reminds one of the geese figuring on the gilt bronze casket discovered from Peshawar and also of the figure of *hamsa* from Taxila. On the lid of the Peshawar relic casket, six geese are found flying with wreaths in their bills, perhaps performing *pradakṣiṇa* (circumambulation) around the relic of the Buddha. Besides, Cunningham discovered from Taxila a circular stone box (1' in diameter and 3" in depth) with a cover, a slab of sand stone. Inside the box was found a hollow crystal figure of a *hamsa* and a thin gold scroll which refers to Buddha's relic. Another crystal neck of a goose was discovered from *Dharmarājika-stūpa* (Taxila). Like the relic casket of Peshawar, the terracotta band of *hamsas* from Rājāḍidāngā might have analogous religious bearings.

The *hamsa* has been always a popular decorative device bearing religious significance. It is indeed a living emblem of purity and virtue. Now it is known for certain that the excavated site of Rājāḍidāngā was once a great seat of Buddhist monastery establishments. The site under excavation has been firmly identified with the illustrious *Raktamṛtitikā-mahāvihāra* described by Hiuen Tsang in the seventh century A.D. These terracotta birds identified with *hamsas* discovered from the site might be also closely associated with the Buddha and Buddhism. It is quite possible that this band of *hamsas* was once affixed on a sacred earthen pot containing perhaps sacred relics or any other objects bearing religious significance.

This particular kind of a frieze of terracotta birds is yet unrecorded and as such, its discovery from Rājāḍidāngā is full of historical import.



## IX

### A MINIATURE METAL IMAGE OF GAṆEŚA

The discovery of metal images of Gaṇeśa has been reported from different parts of Bengal. Excepting some miniature metal images of Gaṇeśa recovered from several casual diggings and one from the excavation at Pāhāḍpur, there is hardly any stratified example. The stratification of the Pāhāḍpur image of Gaṇeśa is not also exactly known. The present communication relates to the discovery of a beautiful miniature 'octo-alloy' image of the elephant-headed God Gaṇeśa from stratified diggings at Rājbaḍidāngā (Mursidābād district, West Bengal).

The present metal image of Gaṇeśa is partly corroded. The figure in *Mahārājaliḷā* posture is seated on a rectangular pedestal measuring 3.03 × 1.03 cm. The total height of the image is 6.00 cm. This is a four-armed figure, each arm holding an attribute. But all the attributes are not distinct. It appears that the upper right and left hands hold *triśūla* (trident) and *mūlaka* (radish) and the lower right hand, *modaka* and the left one, perhaps sweets or a pot. The trunk is exceptionally a long one with a bend towards right touching *modaka*, as if engaged in drinking. The belly with the sacred thread is very prominent. The rat-vehicle resting below right foot is extant. Below, on right, there is the representation of a short figure with folded hands, perhaps a devotee. Along the lower edge on right, there is possibly the figure of a standing lion (?) and below, on left, perhaps a human skull(?). The halo behind stands as an arch over the figure and bears a floral motif at its central summit (Pl. Ia; Pl. II. c and d).

This image of Gaṇeśa was discovered at a depth of 2'8" below surface, in close association with two other metal images of the Buddha imbedded in a huge pottery deposition covering earlier structural remains comprising a long wall and *surki*-rammed floor (Pl. I, b). This pottery deposition yielded a number of inscribed terracotta seals and sealings belonging to c. sixth-ninth century A.D. Accordingly, the pottery-pit may be also attributed to the same period. On the basis of this dating, the present miniature image of Gaṇeśa may be also ascribed to the same period. This stratified dating is quite compatible with the stylistic pattern of the image. The arch-shaped halo luted to the image is an earlier innovation belonging to c. seventh-eighth century A.D. Subsequently, the halo became oval and solid. Therefore, the present image may be confidently attributed to c. seventh-eighth century A.D.

Metal images of Gaṇeśa, exactly analogous to the present example, are not known. The two extant figures (man and animal) below on right are unique features of this image. In this context, a particular reference may be made to the discovery of a well-preserved miniature metal image of Gaṇeśa from Hālud-vihāra (near the market-place of Dvipgañj in Rājsāhi district and eight miles south of Pāhāḍpur), hardly referred to in any important publication. During 1930-31 the site was visited by late G. Chandra who reported the recovery of the image from one of the casual diggings at the mound of Hālud-vihāra. The mound measures 215' and 135' from east to west and from north to south respectively. The height of the mound is about 35' from the ordinary ground level. Frequent operations of the brick-hunters have also exposed several structural remains. This very image was discovered by a local resident from one of those occasional diggings (Pl. II, b).



(a) Front view of the metal image of Gaṇeśa from Rājbaḍidāngā.



(b) Rājbaḍidāngā: A view of the locus of the metal images including one of Gaṇeśa.  
'Metal Image of Gaṇeśa'







(a) Metal image of Gaṇeśa from Pāhāḍpur.



(b) Metal image of Gaṇeśa from Hālud-Vihāra



(c) Another front view of the metal image of Gaṇeśa from Rājibādīdāngā

(d) Side view of the metal image of Gaṇeśa from Rājibādīdāngā.





The image from Hālud-vihāra is 2·5" in height. It is a seated figure of four-armed Gaṇeśa in *mahārājalilā* posture on a circular lotus pedestal. Each of the four hands holds *triśūla*, flower-bud, *kalpalatā* (creeper of paradise) and sweets. The trunk is short and bent towards right. The circular pedestal bears a lotus motif. The rat-*vāhana* is seen below the right foot. The oval solid halo bears beaded decoration along its edge (Pl. II, *b*). The image has been attributed to the eighth-ninth century A.D. Hālud-vihāra was also a great seat of the Buddhist establishment, and the site is reported to be similar to that of Pāhāḍpur.

The Pāhāḍpur (Rājsāhi district) metal image of Gaṇeśa is, however, different from both the Hālud-vihāra and Rājbaḍidāngā examples. The attributes, pedestal, trunk, *etc.*, are all dissimilar (Pl. II). Each of the four hands of the Pāhāḍpur image holds radish with leaves, axe, rosary and sweets (Pl. II., *a*). The halo behind is, however, similar to the Hālud-vihāra example. But the pedestal of the Pāhāḍpur image is plain and circular in three tiers, and the trunk of the deity bends towards left. This image has been ascribed to the eighth-ninth century A.D. Two other miniature octo-alloy images of Gaṇeśa have been reported from Raghurāmpur (Dacca district, East Pakistan). Both the images are 2" in height. One of these images is seated in *mahārājalilā* posture on a lotus seat. The rat has been represented near the feet. The lower and upper hands hold *kalpalatā*. The upper portion of the fringe is like an arch over the figure. This is an exquisite Gaṇeśa image. The second figure is very much corroded. Excepting holding *modaka* by the lower right hand, other attributes of the image cannot be properly distinguished.

As to the making of the metal images, it is now generally believed that Pāhāḍpur was a centre of metal-casting, and the Hālud-vihāra example might have been a derivation from there. But the Rājbaḍidāngā specimen is distinctly different in nature and character from both Hālud-vihāra and Pāhāḍpur images. It appears that like Pāhāḍpur, Rājbaḍidāngā was also a centre of metal-casting. This contention is attested by the discovery of some other metal images, smelting pots, copper lumps, *etc.*, during excavations at the site. In fact, every important Buddhist monastery establishment had a centre of metal-casting of its own, and the images were perhaps made under the direct supervision of the monks.

It is very significant to note that the miniature metal images of Gaṇeśa have been mostly recovered from the Buddhist sites. That the Buddhists also deified the Hindu deities is quite well-known. Gaṇeśa as the bestower of success and protector against evils was worshipped by the Hindus and the Buddhists alike. In the later phase of Buddhism, Gaṇeśa under the name of *Vināyaka* became an important Buddhist deity. At the same time, there are positive indications regarding an aversion to Gaṇeśa in both Buddhist texts and sculptural representations. Gaṇeśa has been also described under the name of *Vighna* or obstacle, and in some sculptural representations, the Buddhist deities have been actually represented as trampling upon him. In spite of such contradictions, the images of the Buddha and Gaṇeśa were perhaps worshipped concurrently in Buddhist shrines. This is also attested by the nature of the discovery of the images of the Buddha and Gaṇeśa in association at Rājbaḍidāngā. It is indeed extremely significant to note that two images of the Buddha and one of Gaṇeśa were found at one place (Pl. I, *b*). It may be presumed that these images were perhaps throwouts in the pottery-pit, and the possibility of these figures being taken out from one particular shrine cannot be also ruled out. It may be further presumed that this image of Gaṇeśa might have been taken out of a Hindu temple and those of the Buddha from a Buddhist shrine. But this is a remote possibility.



It is now known for certain that Rājāḍidāṅgā was the site *par excellence* of the illustrious Buddhist monastery *Raktamṛttikā-mahāvihāra* described by the Chinese pilgrim Hiuen Tsang in the seventh century A.D. The present image of Gaṇeśa was perhaps worshipped along with other images of the Buddhist deities in one of the shrines of this great monastery. The Tāntric affiliation of the present miniature image of Gaṇeśa is amply borne out by its characteristic features and associated figures and motifs. Here is an indication of the influence of Tāntricism in later phase of Buddhism and also of the religious synthesis created by the Buddhists. In this context, the discovery of this miniature metal image of Gaṇeśa from stratified diggings at Rājāḍidāṅgā is extremely significant.

## A FRAGMENTARY CARVED STELE FROM MURŚIDĀBĀD DISTRICT

The present discourse relates to the recovery of a sand stone stele bearing wonderful carved figures and motifs in low relief. The stone slab was discovered while digging a tank in the village Mādhuniā (Murśidābād district, West Bengal). Sri Dharendra Nath Bag of the said village presented the stele to the Department of Archaeology of the University of Calcutta.

The upper part of the stele appears to have been cut by a lethal weapon as indicated by the sharply cut surface at the top (Pl. I. *a*). Fortunately, the lower part of the slab, though considerably damaged and disfigured, is extant (Pl. I., *a*, *b*). The present example is an equally measured four-faced slab, each face measuring 12.01 cm. in breadth (Pl. I. *b*). The extant height of the slab is 20.08 cm., and its square base is flat and plain measuring 12.05 × 12.05 cm. Each of the four faces of the stele contains niches and horizontal panels with series of compartments bearing representations of figures, plants, flowers and other motifs (Pl. I.).

The upper part of the slab's face No. 1 (Pl. II. *a*) contains a deeply cut recess enclosing a modelled standing figure resting on a lotus pedestal, the lower part of which on right is only extant. The drapery is bereft of any fold. The figure appears to be that of a standing Buddha. Both left and right sides of the recess are damaged and nearing the edge on right, there is the carving of a beautiful lotus bud. Below, there are two horizontal panels, each containing six rectangular compartments of almost equal size (1.05 × 2.05 cm.). Beginning from right, first, second, third and sixth compartments of the upper panel enclose a miniature shrine (?), geometrical designs, *ghaṭa* (ritual pot) and snake respectively. The representations inside the fourth and fifth compartments are indistinct. From right, the second, third, fourth and fifth compartments of the lower panel bear plough, lotus, *trīśūla* (trident) and flower respectively. The reliefs inside the first and second chambers are indeterminate.

The face No. 2 (Pl. II. *b*) bears a deeply cut niche enclosing another gracefully modelled standing figure resting on a lotus pedestal like the previous one. Here, the lower part of the figure with foldless drapery is better preserved. This figure appears also to be that of a standing Buddha. On left and right of the recess, faint traces of two attendant figures are extant. Below, there are two horizontal panels, each containing six compartments of almost identical sizes (2.00 × 2.00 cm.) bearing carved motifs. From right, the reliefs inside the first and second chambers of the upper panel and the first, second, fourth, fifth and sixth of the lower one, are indistinct. Other compartments of the upper and lower panels enclose the carving of a plant, conch, umbrella, *dhvajā* (flag) and *ghaṭa* respectively.

On face No. 3 (Pl. III. *a*) of the slab, two recesses and one horizontal panel are extant. The upper recess encloses an admirably modelled seated female figure whose right foot rests on a lotus pedestal upon a boldly carved lion. The lower right hand of the figure appears to hold a lotus(?) or a *vajra*. The seated female figure is perhaps the representation of the Buddhist deity Tārā as *Sinhanāda*. Below, is the second niche bearing two beautifully carved figures in relief; the one on left is a seated male figure in a kneeling position with folded hands, and the one on right is a female figure sitting in a cross-legged posture with the right hand resting on the ground and the left one raising upwards, perhaps holding a flower. The two figures might



represent a pair of devotees or donor-couple. From right, the first and the fourth compartments of the lower panel bear fire altar(?) and an elephant and the middle one, perhaps a *ghaṭa*.

There are equally measured four horizontal niches and one panel on face No. 4 (Pl. III. *b*). From the top, each of the first two niches bears three seated female figures with an analogous hair-dressing pattern. But their sitting postures are different, and their left hands possibly hold flowers. The third niche encloses three extremely interesting figures: the one on left is represented in a kneeling position with one hand resting on the ground and the other raising upwards, and the one on right is a front-facing seated figure with the left hand resting on the ground. In between these two figures there is a peculiar carving of a seated figure with conically pointed beard hanging down. The fourth niche encloses three female figures; the one on left faces rightwards and holds sweets or a basket(?) touching the hip of the central figure carved in a crawling position facing right. The seated figure on right is considerably damaged. The lowermost panel includes six rectangular compartments bearing motifs which are all indistinct, excepting the fifth and sixth ones on left enclosing a swan(?) and a lotus. It is evident that the face No. 4 of the slab contains mythological story-telling panels (Pl. III. *b*).

The stone slab bearing all the above mentioned carved reliefs is unique of its kind. Four-faced stone slabs with carved reliefs are known from Gārhwa. The Mathurā votive slabs called *āyagapattas* may be also alluded to in this connection. The Jaina *Chaturmukha* or *Chaumukha* slabs have been found at Chhatra (Puruliā, West Bengal) and also at many other places of Rājasthān and Western India. But the compositions of all these stone slabs are different. The present stone slab contains the figures of the Buddha, Tārā alongwith story-telling and motif-bearing panels. Similar slabs bearing the figures of the Buddha were also found from Sārnāth and other places. Almost similar figures of the Buddha and Tārā were also made at Bodhgayā and Hāzāribāg. Is this stone slab under discussion a votive *stūpa* bearing the figures of the Buddha, Tārā and other motifs?

The present stone slab from Mādhuniā contains admirably worked out details. First, the slab is profusely decorated with bas-reliefs and hardly any vacant space has been left out. Secondly, the reliefs are diverse and detailed and the balancing of the figures on the face No. 4 has been done creditably. Thirdly, the modelling in the round of the extant legs of the standing and seated figures is also significant. Fourthly, the absence of drapery-folding is also worthy of notice. Fifthly, the highly interesting hair-dressing patterns and the absence of elaborate ornamentation on the carved figures are well-marked characteristics. Sixthly, the sitting postures of the carved human figures are also remarkably attractive. Lastly, it must be admitted that the carving of various motifs on the stele has been also meticulously worked out. All the motifs represented on the stele are indeed full of ritual import.

On the whole, the stone slab under discussion is characterized by closely packed compositions, diverse and detailed reliefs, meticulous working of details, admirable balancing of figures, graceful modelling, multiple hair-dressing patterns and sitting postures, carving of various motifs, etc. Taking into consideration the modelling of the figures and carving of motifs, the present stone slab may be attributed to c. seventh-eighth century A.D. It was perhaps a votive stele. No stone slab with analogously carved composite reliefs is yet known from any other parts of Bengal.





(a) Stone slab: Showing its two faces and sharply cut surface at the top.

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(b) Stone slab: Showing two other faces.





(a) Face No. 1: Showing lower portion of a carved standing figure and decorated panels.



(b) Face No. 2: Showing lower portion of another carved standing figure and decorated panels.







(a) Stone Slab: Face No. 3: Showing lower portion of a carved seated figure, and niche bearing carved figures and a decorated panel below.



(b) Stone Slab: Face No. 4: Showing panels and carved figures.





## XI

### DISCOVERY OF TWO PLANT FOSSIL FRAGMENTS FROM RĀJBĀDĪDĀNGĀ

The subject matter of the present discussion is on the discovery of two extremely significant plant fossil fragments during archaeological excavations at Rājbaḍidāṅgā (Mursidābād district, West Bengal) conducted by the Department of Archaeology of the University of Calcutta.

While continuing diggings below the earliest occupation level at the site, two fossil fragments were unearthed at a depth of 13'6" below the present surface and 86-83 ft. above the mean sea level. These two fossil fragments discovered *in situ* measure 4"×2½"×1½" and 1½"×3"×1" (Pls. I, II). Both the fragments were found embedded in the natural soil composed of yellowish compact clay (Pl. I; Pl. II).

These two plant fossil fragments have been examined by Professor A. K. Ghosh of the University of Calcutta. According to the report submitted by Professor Ghosh, the plant fossils belong to the *Moraceae* family and that they might be ascribed to the latest Pleistocene and earliest Miocene Ages (one million to 25 million years ago).

Plant fossils belonging to the *Cainozoic* Era have been discovered from several parts of West Bengal, more particularly from Bolpur in Bīrbhūm district and Garbetā in Midnapur district. But the details of these fossil finds have not yet been fully worked out. No plant fossil of this variety has yet been discovered from the region of the recovery of the present examples.

It is indeed surprising that plant fossils of more than one million years old were found embedded in the natural soil during stratified diggings at a historical site. Regarding the stratigraphical position of the fossil fragments it may be pointed out that they were found *in situ* at a depth of 3'3" below the earliest occupation level at the site, and the digging in the trench was continued up to a depth of 14' below surface. Just below the occupation level, was unearthed a silt deposition varying in thickness from 3" to 9" and indicating an inundation caused by the overflow of water from the river Bhāgirathī. The first occupational evidence in this excavated area of the trench lay over this silt deposition. Below the silt deposition, the cutting was continued through the natural soil up to a depth of 3'5" (Pls. I & II). The plain cutting witnessed no disturbance whatsoever. Naturally, the question arises as to how these two fossil fragments got embedded in the natural soil at the present site under excavation. This is indeed a knotty problem.

Another problem relates to the determination of the original source of this kind of plant fossils. There is little possibility of the fossilization of these plants in the region of their discovery. In fact, these fossils in question are foreign to this particular area in the district of Mursidābād. The probable source of this kind of fossils is perhaps the Siwaliks in the Himalayas. It may be accordingly suggested that the two fossil fragments might have drifted through the Gaṅgā and deposited at the present site of their discovery. Nothing in particular can be said about the time of their drifting and deposition. It is, however, known from archaeological records unearthed at the site that the earliest occupation at Rājbaḍidāṅgā can be well attributed to c. second-third century A.D. Accordingly, the fossil fragments were perhaps deposited at the site long before the earliest occupation at Rājbaḍidāṅgā.

If the Siwalik region is the possible source of this kind of plant fossils, the only plausible explanation is that they drifted to the present site. But how and when these two fossil fragments drifted to the locus of their discovery cannot be properly answered at the present state of our knowledge. Yet, the unearthing of these two fossil fragments at Rājbaḍidāṅgā is indeed extremely significant. Further study on plant fossils recovered from different parts of Bengal might throw fresh light on the problems connected with the discovery of these two fossil fragments from the excavated site of Rājbaḍidāṅgā.





(a) Rājbaḍidāṅgā: Cuttings—Showing two plant fossil fragments *in situ*.



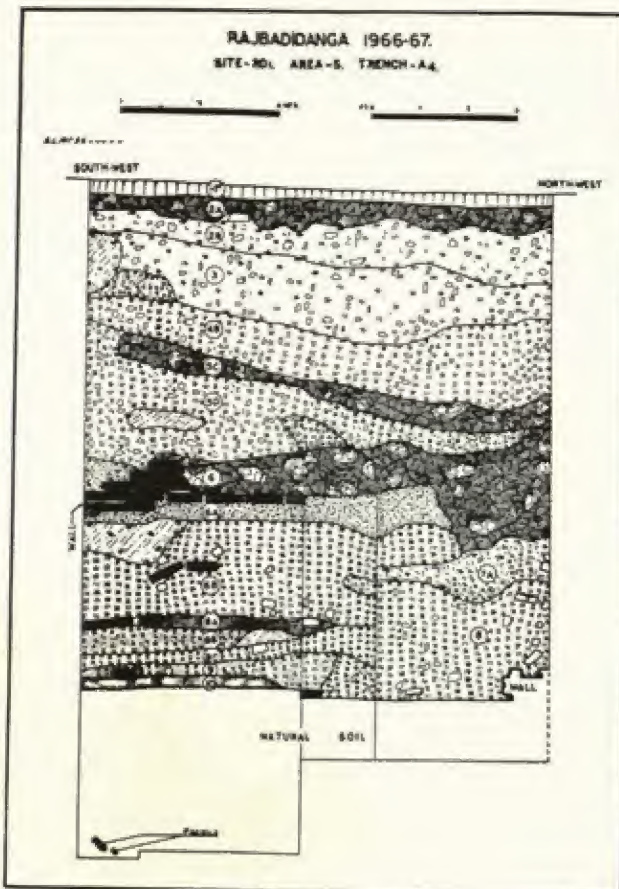
(b) Rājbaḍidāṅgā: Cuttings in the trench A<sup>4</sup> and plant fossil fragments *in situ*.  
'Fossil Fragments'







(a) Rājbadīdāngā: One plant Fossil fragment.



(b) Tr. A<sup>4</sup>: Section facing West showing layer compositions and the locus of the fossil fragments.

'Fossil Fragments'





**LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS**



## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

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- (b) Sāgardighi: A general view of an extensive Mound near Sārgardighi.

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- (a) Brāhmaṇīgrām: A general view of structural remains on the mound.
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- (b) Stone Slab: Showing two other faces.

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- (b) FACE No. II: Showing lower portion of another carved standing figure and decorated panels.

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## (a) Rājbaḍidāṅgā: One plant Fossil fragment.

(b) Trench A<sup>4</sup>: Section facing West showing layer depositions and the locus of the Fossil fragments.



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